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THE NAVY IN INDIA  
1763—1783



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Navy in the War of 1739-1748  
(three vols.)

National Policy and Naval Strength

Naval Warfare

Command and Discipline





INDIA, FROM BOMBAY TO GANJAM.  
 The theatre in which operations took place 1782-1783.

# THE NAVY IN INDIA

1763—1783

BY  
ADMIRAL SIR HERBERT RICHMOND

WITH CHARTS AND DIAGRAMS

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## PREFACE

IN this study of the policy governing the naval forces in India and the operations conducted in the Indian theatre in the wars between 1763 and 1783 I have not aimed at giving in any detail the movements of the squadrons or the individual ships in the hard-fought battles off the Coromandel coast. These have been described in many published works, both French and English. It has been my aim to indicate the policy, the causes affecting the strategy, and the influences governing the tactics employed by the commanders; and to bring out the many circumstances of weather, of supplies, of health and of material which played so large a part in the campaigns.

I am most deeply indebted to Mr. D. J. B. Turner and Mr. Reimers, the Government Archivist at Colombo, for having unearthed in the records there the correspondence of Suffren with the Dutch Governor and for placing it at my disposal; to Mr. C. W. Bickmore, Assistant Colonial Treasurer, for permitting me to make use of the great quantity of information which he has gathered in his unremitting investigations into the archives in Ceylon, at Pondicherry and in Paris; to Mr. D. Bonner Smith, of the Admiralty Library, who, out of his wide acquaintance with naval history, has furnished me with suggestions and information which have helped me greatly in clearing up several points of difficulty; and to Mr. C. Graham Botha, Chief Archivist at Cape Town, for the information he has furnished me from the Cape Archives. Finally, I have to thank Lord Sandwich for his permission and the facilities he gave me to examine the Sandwich papers at Hinchinbrook.

H. W. R.

*June 1930.*



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"Since war is a terrible and impassioned drama, let us study the drama itself. Let us see the actors playing in the different scenes of which it is composed. With that object, take up the facts which history places at our disposal. To understand that complex phenomenon of war in the many forms in which it appears, let us take these facts successively, examine them as closely as possible as though with a microscope. Let us treat it as a study in microbiology, doing so in the midst of the circumstances in which these facts have developed—time, place, climate, fatigue, the many depressing causes, the misunderstandings. Let us consider the questions which the actors themselves had to solve, the company in its zone of action, the battalion, the brigade and the army in theirs. Let us see what the difficulties were which they had to overcome and how they got the better of them. Let us discuss the decisions that were made, and treat the whole question anew."—

FOCH : *Des principes de la Guerre.*

"From the circumstances attending on the battles of Sir Edward Hughes, it is recommended, as indispensably necessary, never to come to action with the fleets of our enemy without a positive determination to take or destroy as many as possible."—ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES EKINS, *Naval Battles*, p. 563.

## INTRODUCTION

IN each of the three great European wars fought after the Peace of Utrecht in which England took part on the one side and France on the other, India and its surrounding seas was one of the theatres of operations. In the first round of the struggle for Colonial Empire which took place between 1744 and 1748 the fighting in the Indian theatre had a purely commercial object. It was in reality no more than a struggle between the two Companies, conducted with the hope of getting rid of, or weakening, a commercial rival. It was informed by no great strategical or even political aim. The honours, in so far as there were any, were fairly evenly divided though the greater results accrued to Britain. While France, by a bold *coup de main*, captured Madras, a success due mainly to pusillanimity on the part of the naval commander at sea and the Governor on shore, England completely arrested the whole flow of the French Eastern trade, her own trade—except from Madras—continuing with but negligible interruption; and while Madras was restored to England at the peace, and with its return much of the prestige which had been lost by its fall was regained, France's losses of shipping and commerce were not capable of restoration, and such prestige as remained to her was reduced seriously by the subsequent recall of Dupleix.

In the next war the object stepped up to a higher plane. Though the effort of each Power sprang from commercial motives, the actual struggle had not so purely commercial a character as that of 1744–1748. The operations did not merely constitute an attempt to sweep up some shipping, to capture some settlements, to damage a rival tradesman. They aimed at settling the question of whether England or



France should be the predominant European Power in India, the possible heir of the Moghuls. France having no ally at sea, the British had a great naval superiority until Spanish help, traditionally tardy, came too late upon the scene to redress the balance of strength. This time it was the French settlements that fell. Chandernagore and Pondicherry were lost, British power was greatly extended, and although the terms of the Peace of Paris restored her settlements to France, and expressly recognised her full and undiminished rights of trade, the restrictions imposed upon her fortifications and the decision as to who should rule at Arcot left no doubt that the predominance in India was British, and that an Empire was in the process of formation.

Established upon the solid foundation of superiority at sea the British position in India then appeared unshakable. When, however, the next war arose that foundation had been undermined. Unquestioned superiority at sea disappeared and in its place there stood, eventually, numerical inferiority; an inferiority tempered, happily for England, by disunion among her three maritime opponents. But even the relative position of England and France alone in 1778 was very different from what it had been from 1756-1763. Unembarrassed by military commitments on the Continent France was able to throw her energies into her maritime power: and she had developed that power by wise administration and attention to training. England, on the other hand, burdened with debt and an inefficient administration, and eagerly seeking every channel for economy, had neglected her navy in the years of peace. The ships which had been the means by which her conquering armies had reached Canada, Havana and Pondicherry, which had saved the West Indies and its vital trade, and had preserved the country from invasion, were allowed to rot in the dockyards, surrounded by unfilled store-houses and empty mast-ponds. Seventy-six ships of the line were, in modern phrase,

“scrapped” between the Peace of Paris and the outbreak of the war of American Independence; and those which remained were neglected, their defects mounting up monthly, while the stores and timber necessary to maintain them were not supplied. Thus in 1778 the Navy which had been the foundation of the Colonial Empire could not send to sea a squadron more than equal to that which was prepared in Brest, and ships could not be brought forward in time to go to the Mediterranean to frustrate the intentions of a small squadron at Toulon: and for the great part of 1782 a British squadron had to conduct a defensive struggle in inferior force not only to give some defence to the interests of the British in India but to maintain their very existence, and preserve the Empire from even more humiliating surrenders in other parts of the world.

The compelling influences which brought about the campaigns are too often neglected. We follow with care and in detail the movements of a squadron, we approve or condemn the commander's strategy or his tactics. But too little are we inclined to seek the reasons which sent his, or his enemy's, squadrons and armies to a particular theatre, to understand the policy which was being put into execution by his forces, and the influence of that policy itself upon his actions.

What were the conditions in which we found ourselves fighting in the Indian theatre with a French squadron at sea and French troops on land between 1778 and 1783? Three years earlier a civil war had broken out between the English of the United Kingdom and those of their North American Colonies. The opportunity offered to France and Spain for recovering some and revenging other of the losses they had sustained in earlier wars appeared too favourable to be resisted. Successively they joined the rebellious colonists. Two years later Holland, an ally bound to England by ancient treaty, did the same when she found herself debarred from making the commercial profits she hoped to derive from the troubles of her neighbours.

Why, in this situation, should the Eastern seas have become a fighting ground? What requirements of strategy demanded that this remote theatre should be selected for fighting, when the issues of British rule in North America or the possession of Gibraltar could have been determined by the crushing of England's Navy in the Channel and the landing of a French and Spanish Army? Was it possible to limit the area of the war, to draw a meridian through Table Bay or a parallel across the North Atlantic, and declare mutually—"no war beyond the line"? Fantastic this may certainly appear at first sight: yet the doctrine of war and peace beyond a line was not unknown in earlier times.

Again then, was there a strategical object, or was the object purely political, in this fighting on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts? How could a battle between some 7,000 British seamen, in a dozen ships of war, and a similar number of French seamen in about the same number of ships, affect the questions of whether the colonists in America should be free from the British Crown, France should recover what she had previously lost, Spain reoccupy Gibraltar or Holland obtain the licence to supply belligerents with contraband of war? Is there any connecting link which unites a struggle in India with the main object of the war?

The connecting link is trade. The interest in India of all those European Powers, from the Portuguese onwards, who had established connections and settlements in the East was concerned with trade only. The venturers who rounded the Cape of Good Hope on their six months' voyage did not do so with any ideas of establishing dominion, of conquering territory, of bringing populations under their rule. They went to India to trade: and in so far as territory was concerned, they were interested only in the security of those limited areas in which they had built their storehouses and conducted their business or from which they derived some part of their revenues. Although a prosperous trade is a national benefit it was only those both in France and England

Who directly derived the profits of the Eastern trade who watched with interest the prosperity of the companies which held the practical monopoly. To them, Eastern policy was good or bad according as it increased or decreased their revenues: nor is the test one to be contemned. This view had this not unnatural result: that above all things that which was to be avoided was war in the East, whatever might happen elsewhere. War in India or its seas might certainly prove advantageous if there were a reasonable expectation that the rival traders would be driven out of the country, as the British traders had been driven from the Spice Islands by the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

But what seemed more probable was that the forces of the two Companies would fight each other, each would do great injury to the other, but in the end the position of neither would be improved. A commercial struggle for the Indian trade would still continue unabated after many crores of rupees had been poured out in a fruitless effort to expel a trading rival by force.

It would therefore be surprising if the idea of preserving neutrality in the East had not occurred to the persons principally concerned, the trading Companies: and if, the idea having occurred, it should not have been put in the form of a definite proposal, pointing out the mutual advantages of avoiding the losses each Company must suffer if they carried the disputes of their Governments into their private concerns. On the other hand, it would not be surprising if such a proposal were rejected, if its adoption appeared to prevent one belligerent from deriving some advantages from conducting warfare in this region, so remote from the decisive theatre.

Competition there had been between the British and French Companies since the latter came into being late in the seventeenth century, but it had not been severe until about the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. A general spirit of toleration, of a recognition that there was

ample room for both, had existed. Each Company had its difficulties with local rulers. There was little or no object in adding to those difficulties by fighting each other. But as trade increased, as opportunities of making great fortunes dangled before the eyes of the Companies' servants, adventurers took the field. What could be of greater advantage to the French Company, if the revenues which went into Madras poured instead into Pondicherry, those of Calcutta into Chandernagore, or vice versa. Though the parent nations could hardly be persuaded to go to war with each other for the advantage of the Companies, war, if it should arise, would furnish the opportunity for making a clean sweep of the rival traders if, by forethought and organisation, superior force could be ready on the spot to fall upon the enemy and destroy him before he could be reinforced.

So had reasoned Mahé de Labourdonnais. A seaman of St. Malo, he had been appointed Governor of the Islands Mauritius and Bourbon in 1734, where he built up a great establishment and dreamed dreams of conquest. After six years of Governorship he returned to France, there to find Europe on the verge of a general war. Already Frederick of Prussia was fighting the Queen of Hungary, Britain was at war with Spain, and Spain with Hungary; and Britain and France, though not at war, were biting their thumbs at each other, and both were aiding, as auxiliaries, the opposing parties in the continental struggle. These ill-defined and unstable relations could not be expected to continue indefinitely. War must come sooner or later. Therefore, urged Labourdonnais, let us be first on the spot with superior force. The British maintained no regular fighting forces of the Crown in the Eastern Seas, and though the Company had its Marine, it was composed of small vessels only, while the trading vessels, though defensively armed, were normally scattered in their occupations. A French fighting squadron, if it were concentrated before-

hand, could sweep the seas of British commerce, and with the help of troops could destroy all the British trading settlements long before British reinforcements could arrive from Europe.

The idea was attractive. It received the approval of the Directors of the Company. The Crown smiled on it and was prepared to lend some men-of-war. Seven fighting ships were placed at the disposal of Labourdonnais, and with these he returned in high and pleasurable hopes to his islands. But after he had sailed the Company, or the Crown, thought better of it. Was this course really as advantageous as it had appeared, painted in the glowing colours of the Malouin artist? After all, Britain was very strong at sea. Local successes might be gained, but wars last a long time—the last one had continued for some twelve years. There was plenty of time to restore the position at sea, and he who commanded at sea unquestionably commanded India in the long run. The matter was reconsidered, and in 1742 the French Company put forward a suggestion for the observance of neutrality in the East if war should arise between the Crowns in Europe. The settlements should continue in peace with each other, as they had been for forty years; ships putting into the ports of the other, whether in India, the Islands or St. Helena, not having received notice of the war in Europe, should not only not be free from arrest but should receive any help they needed; and ships of each Company meeting at sea should behave in every way as they did in peace, giving each other any aid they might require.

Cardinals Fleury and Tencin approved the proposals, which were brought to London by a Mr. Lowther, a servant of the English Company—with an assurance from them that if they were accepted they would be ratified by the French Crown. The English Company viewed them doubtfully. Though they submitted them to the Government they expressed the opinion, in acknowledging their receipt, that

“such a thing would be of no service further than as it may be agreed on, as in the late war, between the settlements, as was done betwixt Madras and Pondicherry. It would be our interest in all events to get ships of war there, and though hitherto they have done us little service in those parts yet we think as the French ships are now loaden richly it would be a strong temptation to them to look after them.”

Metaphorically shrugging his shoulders at this blindness of the British to their interests, M. Dumas, the head of the French Company, expressed his regret that the British should take this view. The proposal, he remarked, was in reality wholly to their advantage, since they had the more trade to lose. Nevertheless, in the hope that views might change, the French Company revoked their previous orders to Labourdonnais. They recalled the squadron from India, and even without awaiting whatever decision might be made by the British Cabinet sent sealed orders to their two Governors, Dupleix and Labourdonnais, forbidding any attacks on the British on land or sea and enjoining that all operations should be strictly confined to defence. If war should come, Dupleix was formally to present the British Governors with the proposal for neutrality.

The proposal duly reached the British Government, who took the same view as the Company, though for different reasons. With over 120 ships of the line to the some sixty of France they saw no compelling reason for placing an area, where great advantages might be gained, out of bounds. Was France to be free to employ her land power as she chose, weakening British security by the annexation of the Low Countries, and Britain to be restrained from using her sea power to increase her own commercial strength, and to cripple French finance, the silver bullets of her army? British Ministers gave no countenance to the suggestion.<sup>1</sup> When therefore in 1744 war was declared between the

<sup>1</sup> The proposals are in Hardwicke MS, 35906.

Powers, Britain was the first to have a fighting squadron in the Bay of Bengal, and except for the reverse at Madras she subsequently commanded the situation for the next two years by her superiority at sea. The French East India Trade, a tender plant already enervated by Government interference and subsidies, was completely destroyed by the time the news of peace reached India in 1749.

After the war both Companies had time and opportunity to take stock of the situation, and to consider whether experience had shown, from their commercial points of view, that "peace beyond the line" was a policy to the advantage of either. The French Company, who had thus seen their trade completely ruined, came to the obvious conclusion that neutrality was to their advantage, and in 1753 they raised once more the question of neutrality in India and the Indian Seas in case of war between England and France.

The English Company at that time, and for many years afterwards, included in its organisation a "Secret Committee": a body of a small number of men to which a staff of a fighting service corresponds to-day. To this body it fell to consider and recommend the policy of such operations as its forces should conduct in India and to prepare the necessary instructions and orders. The Directors referred the proposal to this Secret Committee, which in turn consulted a person described as "a gentleman of great experience of the settlements and trade." This gentleman expressed himself most strongly in favour of the policy of neutrality proposed by the French. His reasons convinced the members of the Committee, and they in turn convinced the Directors.

The considerations upon which the conclusion was reached ran upon the following lines. France, with her great military strength in regulars and organised militia, was quite secure from invasion by sea on her coasts. Her Navy, not therefore being needed for territorial defence, was at the disposal of her rulers for use offensively in any part of the world. The great strength of her Army made it possible for her to



spare troops without difficulty for oversea campaigns, which could be carried in or under the protection of her fleet.

Although news would be received in England that expeditions were in preparation in France, it never could be known whether these were feints or real attacks, nor whither they were going. Britain could not send her ships of war to all the many places thus liable to attack without so weakening herself at home as to be practically unguarded. Without a superior fleet in home waters the country might be invaded or its trade brought to a standstill. The aim of Britain therefore must always be to have as much as possible of our naval force at home, and this would best be attained by being secure from attack abroad. The only way to obtain that security in the East Indies was by way of a neutrality there : for the Company itself could not afford to keep a standing army in India equal to what France, with her great military resources, could send thither. The result of no neutrality was thus clear. France had it in her power to destroy all our settlements before the British Government could protect them. We see in this an echo, from the opposite wall, of Labourdonnais's views.

The Company then expatiated upon the benefits which neutrality in the East would confer upon Britain. There would be no anxiety for the Company's settlements, and therefore no need to send ships to defend them. The cost of a squadron would be saved, and no loss of seamen in those unhealthy climates would be suffered. Instead, those ships and seamen would be available to block up the coasts of France and cut off French trade. The shipping and settlements in the East would require no defence and those men of war otherwise engaged either in those distant waters, or detached as escorts between St. Helena and home, would be saved. Instead of fighting at a disadvantage in the Indian seas, where France had the great asset of Mauritius, we should fight in our own chosen waters. Concentration of effort would result.

Finally, the Company urged that for the Government to refuse to agree to a neutrality would be to put upon the Company an unjust burden. It was already charged with giving free freight to the squadron's stores, with demurrage and other charges. Ready as they were to recognise that it was their duty to provide their own defence against the Asiatic sea powers, with whom it was not practicable to enter into an agreement, it was not just to make them liable for further expenses. But, they asked, if war came with a European Power and as one result the settlements were destroyed, would the Government repair them? Now, therefore, while peace exists, was the time to make an arrangement for neutrality: "for assuredly the French who can ruin our settlements before we can protect them, will never agree to a neutrality once war should have broken out."

What should be the limits of the neutral area and the objectives to which neutrality should apply? The Directors faced this problem squarely. It should in any case extend to the settlements of both nations, to all ships of either Company, and to the ships and goods of all subjects of each nation trading in the seas between the Cape of Good Hope and twenty leagues eastward of the Canton River. To confine it, however, to that area would place the French at an advantage. While their victualling, repairing and assembling station, Mauritius, would thereby be immune, the corresponding British station, St. Helena, at which the British ships watered, victualled and were met by their escorts on their homeward voyage, would be exposed to capture. St. Helena must therefore be included in the neutrality.

This would be the minimum requirement of the arrangement; but it would be of still greater advantage to the Company if the immunity were extended to all ships of either Company from the time of sailing from their ports until their return.

This forerunner of the doctrine of Freedom of the Seas

was submitted to Lord Holderness. No reply appears to have been made by him. The strategical answers might have been retrospective or prospective. Retrospectively viewed, the late war had given no evidence that the French could reach the Indies first: on the contrary, the British squadron had been first in those seas and was there unchallenged for over a year before a French flag appeared. Prospectively viewed, we might expect the answer to take the lines of the Admiralty memorandum of a few years later which argued that the security of the outer possessions of the Empire could be assured by a strong squadron off Brest.

The Seven Years' War followed three years later. The experience of that war was not calculated to reduce the strength of the belief that the Navy could give defence to the Colonies and India, and could carry the offensive into the enemy's possessions: for it was the French settlements which had been captured, the French trade destroyed. None of the theories proclaimed by the Company had proved true in practice. Moreover, the British Government had too little reason to repose any profound faith in international agreements of any nature after its experience of the almost universal breach of the engagements made under the Pragmatic Sanction and the equally notorious failure of foreign rulers to perform those services in war which, in peace, they had engaged themselves to perform. The contrast between precept and practice was too strongly marked to allow great and vital British interests to be committed to such a frail defence. The temptation which the unprotected trade would offer would prove too great for the agreements to be observed.

While no more appears to have been heard of the proposal in England it likewise vanished in France. We may perhaps expect that French statesmen saw neither purpose nor dignity in renewing a proposal twice rejected. But other and more practical reasons were sufficient to prevent its renewal. A great change had then taken place in the

French Eastern organisation. The monopoly of the French East India Company was abolished, the affairs of the Eastern trade were no longer directed by a single commercial body. The "Company Colony" of Mauritius was transferred to the Crown. The policy to be followed in India in war was now a concern for the military advisers of the French Crown. The interests of a single trading company no longer dominated the situation. The questions of whether operations should be conducted in the Eastern seas and territories, the object of such operations, and the forces to be employed, were considered with an eye to the war as a whole, not the sectional interest of one body of traders in one area. Thus regarded, the problem appeared in a different light, a light closely resembling that in which it had appeared to the British Company in 1753. An attack in India would act as a diversion. It would weaken England's power of resistance in Europe.

This conclusion was reached as a result of a series of studies which were begun almost immediately after the signing of the Peace of Paris. The losses of Canada, in the French Navy, of France's oversea commerce, and of her possessions in the West Indies, and the humiliating conditions attached to the terms of the article relating to India in the Treaty, caused the French Ministry to set its house in order, with that energy, thoroughness and honest facing of facts characteristic of that great people. Under the energetic and able rule of Choiseul, the Navy once more became a living force. The prospect of another war with England was considered in a practical manner. How, if such a war arose, should France employ her forces by land and sea in co-operation?

The study of this question began almost immediately after the peace in 1763. One fundamental principle informed the conclusion. The only way to subdue England was to invade her. To effect this required security for the line of passage of the troops. Security demanded the establishment of superiority of force. How was this superiority to be obtained?

The British Navy could be roughly calculated at twice the strength of that of France—meticulous measurements of ships and guns had not then come into vogue. By what means could an inferior navy produce superiority where it was wanted? The plans considered represented almost every degree of strategical intellectuality. There were the purely fantastic, depending upon evasion, upon surprise, or upon some remarkable mechanical invention—a magnet which always attracts the minds of a certain class of persons. None of these offered the smallest prospect of success. It became evident that none was practicable and that a Navy greater than France could afford in addition to the Army indispensable to her for the security of her land frontiers, was an obvious necessity. It was not less obvious that Spain was the natural source of increase. She had territories to recover from England—Jamaica and Gibraltar: she had humiliations to redress. And she had a Navy, though not one of any marked efficiency. The junction of the two navies would produce a combined fleet approximately equal, numerically, to that of England.

Numerical and actual strength are different things: and equality is neither inferiority nor superiority in strategy. No mere concentration of the two fleets in the Channel would offer any reasonable prospects of a victory at sea so decisive as to render the path safe for the passage of an army and its subsequent maintenance. Concentration alone was an insufficient means of achieving the superiority required: there must also be diversion of British force elsewhere. Vitally important British possessions or interests must be threatened with attacks in as many places as possible. The preparation of a squadron with troops on board at Brest would be bound to put Whitehall at once in a flutter, for its destination might be the West Indies, whose trade was of the first importance, the West Coast of Africa with its Guinea Trade, the Mediterranean, Ireland or the Eastern Seas: and if many squadrons should sail, the interests

in all of these several areas would be exposed to serious danger.

Thus the idea develops on these lines. The French military object is the invasion of England. To invade, France must obtain superiority in the Channel. To obtain superiority she must oblige the English to dissipate so much force in defence elsewhere that they would be inferior at the decisive spot. To this end the Spaniards shall make diversions, attacking Gibraltar and Jamaica and sending expeditions to Ireland and into Portugal. French expeditions shall make other diversions, landing in Scotland, capturing Minorca, and attacking the English trade and settlements in India. This will place England in a most difficult situation. She will know that many expeditions are afoot but she will be torn with uncertainty as to their destinations or intentions. So many interests of great importance being at stake, she will be obliged to send out forces to all these threatened places, and, her stake being greater than that of France, she will have to send larger ones than those. The result will be that the allies will be left with superiority in the decisive theatre, the Channel. Thus, India in this war is the theatre of one of a number of diversions, the combined object of all which is to produce sufficient superiority in the Channel to enable an invading army to cross in safety. The operations to be undertaken there have, in this scheme, a definite relation to a complete war plan. They are not, as they had been in the earlier wars, mere eccentric attacks.

While the war in India was thus an intrinsic part in a strategical whole, so also was there a similar interdependence between the campaigns in the several Presidencies. The fact that the Presidencies were thus interdependent was, however, too little recognised, in particular by the Bombay Government where a narrow local view of local advantages prevailed. As there was no single directing mind vested with full power to co-ordinate policy and strategy so there resulted a failure to concentrate effort upon one thing at a

time : that simple but so often neglected a principle of every activity in life. The critical situation which developed in the end of 1782, arising directly as it did out of failures in minor strategy and tactics, was due less to those failures themselves than to that weakness everywhere which played so large a part in bringing them about and was the result of a political policy of dissipation of aim.

But if there was a want of singlemindedness in the direction of British policy on the scale of the whole, so too there was a want of strategical co-ordination of effort in the lower scale of the operations of the services in those theatres in which they were acting side by side—the Coromandel coast, the Carnatic and Ceylon. When the very existence of the British in Southern India was threatened simultaneously by two imminent dangers—Hyder on land and the French squadron and army from the sea—nothing was of greater importance than to determine against which body of the enemy to engage the combined efforts of the navy and army, and to concentrate upon the selected objective. While the need for not losing command at sea was clear, it was insufficiently seen that the result of the dispute of the command at sea would depend in a high degree in the first place upon the possession of a base, in the second upon the base being independent of the squadron for its security. Yet it was only with the greatest difficulty, and after long delays which, by postponing the expedition until the season of bad weather jeopardised its success, that a few troops and those indifferent were scraped together to capture Negapatam and Trincomali. When these places were taken the measures which would ensure the retention of the more important Trincomali and the freedom the squadron were left undone. Jaffna, the capture of which would have served to cover Trincomali, was left alone : and neither troops nor munitions in adequate quantities were furnished for the garrison, nor was that trivial expenditure made of money and labour which was necessary to restore the fortifications to order.

Hence Trincomali was lost. A situation of real peril then arose. This is not to say that if Admiral Hughes had displayed the passionate energy of his rival, his preference for time over mere material as an element in war, Trincomali might, even with its feeble defences, have been held. But a garrison whose relief may not be possible immediately owing to distance, to weather conditions, to want of information and all the protean forms in which surprise declares itself in war, should be able to hold out for more than a bare few days. A commander in the field or at sea has the right to assume that his base is capable of holding out against a *coup de main*, is self-supporting for a reasonable period against any attack that the enemy may be known to be capable of making. This essential condition was not fulfilled : and it is plain that the reason for its not being fulfilled was a failure to appreciate the fact that the foundation stone of success on land was the power of the squadron at sea : and that therefore by all possible means that power must be raised as high as possible. Its material power could not be altered, but its strength could be increased, or (what is the same thing) that of the enemy decreased, by the possession of those facilities and advantages which a secure base confers.

The danger to which the British possessions and interests in India were exposed in 1782 and 1783 was due to many causes : but of these far from the least was the failure to distinguish the keystone of the situation and to direct the efforts of the Navy and the Army in full co-operation towards the attainment of an object common to both.





## CHAPTER I

### POLICY OF THE EAST INDIAN SQUADRON, 1763-1771

ALTHOUGH the Treaty of Paris was not signed until February 10th, 1763, the Seven Years' War ended, in the Indian Seas, for all practical purposes with the surrender of Pondicherry in January 1761. No further operations of any importance took place. Mauritius, the only remaining support of French power in the East, then maintained no forces that affected the course of operations, and although the question of its capture was considered, its immediate importance was felt to be insufficient to warrant the diversion of force necessary. The expedition to Manilla in 1762 was purely a blow at Spain. It had no relation to affairs in India. It was a part of that policy, so frequently pursued by British Ministers, of striking Spain in the vulnerable spots represented by the overseas centres of her trade.

The XIth Article of the Definitive Treaty of February 9th, 1763, dealt with the settlement in the East Indies. It ran as follows :

“ In the East Indies Great Britain shall restore to France, in the condition they are now in, the different factories which that Crown possessed, as were on the Coast of Corromandel and Orixá as on that of Malabar, as also in Bengal, at the beginning of the year 1749. And His Most Christian Majesty, shall restore, on his side, all that he may have conquered from Great Britain in the East Indies during the present war, and will expressly cause Natal and Tappanoully, on the Island of Sumatra, to be restored ; he engages further not to erect fortifications or to keep troops, in any part of the subah of Bengal. And in order to preserve future peace on the coast of Corromandel and Orixá, the English and

French shall acknowledge Mahomet Ally Khan for lawful nabob of the Carnatic, and Salabat Jing for lawful Subar of the Decan ; and both parties shall renounce all demands and pretensions of satisfaction with which they might charge each other, or their Indian Allies, for the depredations or pillage committed on the one side or on the other during the war."

In the latter months of 1762, as peace drew near and became more certain, the redistribution of the fleet on a peace basis was considered by the Admiralty : and on January 5th, 1763, the Board addressed their proposals for the reduction of the fleet to a peace establishment to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department. It was usual to base the annual cost of the Navy in peace primarily upon the number of seamen to be borne, and the strength each year was expressed in terms of men. The Board assumed that the peace establishment would be, as it had been previously, one of 16,000 men. For what reason that figure was adopted is not clear. It appears merely to represent what Parliament was disposed to spend rather than meet the demands of a particular situation. It was for the Admiralty to distribute these men in such ships, and on such stations, as it considered proper for the services of peace ; and only when, owing to special demands, it became necessary to fit out more ships, was the number increased. After the many years of war and partial peace it at length again returned to the figure of 16,000 in 1793.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Men voted annually 1763-1785 ; and in 1793.

1763	. 30,000	1775	. 18,000	1781	. 90,000 (f)
1764-1770	16,000	1776	. 26,000 (c)	1782	. 100,000
1771	. 40,000 (a)	1777	. 45,000	1783	. 110,000
1772	. 25,000 (b)	1778	. 60,000 (d)	1784	. 26,000 (g)
1773	. 20,000 (b)	1779	. 70,000 (e)	1785-1788	18,000
1774	. 26,000 (b)	1780	. 85,000	1793	. 16,000

(a) Falkland Islands. (b) Threat of French war. (c) War with N. Colonies. (d) War with France. (e) War with Spain. (f) War with United Provinces. (g) First year of peace.

The revolt of the American Colonies was calculated to deprive us of 1,800 seamen.

Using this figure in their calculations, the Board proposed a redistribution of the fleet, then manned by 85,605 men, which would bring the complements down to the figure of 16,000. All the fully manned squadrons were to be reduced to frigate forces with 50- or 40-gun ships—heavy frigates which on occasion could fight in the line—as flagships.

The arrangements proposed were as follows :

	Line.	50- and 40-gun ships.	32 to 20-gun frigates.	Sloops.	Outters, etc.
Jamaica . . . . .	1	1	5	4	—
Leeward Is. . . . .	—	1	4	2	—
Newfoundland and N. America	—	3	11	11	—
Africa . . . . .	—	1	1	2	—
Mediterranean . . . . .	—	1	4	2	—
Coasts of Britain . . . . .	—	—	7	9	60
Guardships . . . . .	20	—	—	—	—
	21	7	32	30	60

Of these, the “ guardships ” were ships of the line of from 80 to 60 guns, in commission, but only partly manned with crews of 200 men. They were distributed between the ports in readiness to complete in an emergency.<sup>1</sup> Lord Sandwich had a hard fight with Lord North to maintain this force, when the latter desired to reduce the naval vote. On this matter the King wrote : “ I cannot conclude without expressing my approbation of Lord Sandwich’s plan of having the guardships always ready for immediate service : that will, I am persuaded, prevent many wars. For by that means, we have ever twenty large ships ready before the enemy can equip one, consequently about the start of three months, which is an immense advantage in all military operations.”<sup>2</sup> The remaining ships were laid up “ in ordinary,” which meant that before being fit for receiving men they would require repairs and cleaning : work which occupied an appreciable time. In December 1770, for

<sup>1</sup> Viz. Portsmouth, 8 ; Plymouth, 9 ; Chatham, 2 ; Sheerness, 1.

<sup>2</sup> George III to Lord North, April 20th, 1772. Fortescue, *Correspondence of King George III*, vol. i, p. 129.

example, when an additional force of fifteen ships of the line with proportional frigates was required quickly, the Admiralty reported that the surveyor of the Navy estimated that it would take from five to seven weeks to make them ready for putting crews on board.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it was not then proposed to maintain any permanent peace squadron in the Eastern seas, and half of the nine ships and eight<sup>2</sup> frigates with which the campaigns had been fought were ordered home. Four ships of the line, four frigates and a sloop remained temporarily under Commodore John Bladen Tinker with his broad pendant on board the *Medway*, 60.

As soon as the conditions of the Treaty of Paris had been fulfilled, orders were sent for a still further reduction. Two small frigates and a sloop<sup>3</sup> under Captain the Hon. John Byron were then (January 1765) considered sufficient for service in the East Indies, and these were still further reduced a year later to one frigate only, under Captain Philip Affleck. The withdrawal of all the naval force from the Eastern seas was completed in May 1767, when this last ship returned to England, and the defence at sea of the Company's trade and settlements then devolved upon their own Navy, the Bombay Marine. This force consisted, in 1766, of seventeen vessels of various sizes from 20-gun ships to 6- or 8-gunned gallivats, mounting in all 196 guns and manned by 1,217 seamen, partly Europeans and partly native ratings.<sup>4</sup> A well equipped dockyard, with a large body of skilled Indian artificers capable of both repairing and building ships, was in existence at the Marine's Headquarters, Bombay. This was

<sup>1</sup> Viz. Five at Chatham in seven weeks; four at Portsmouth in five; five at Plymouth in six; and one at Woolwich in five.

<sup>2</sup> Norfolk and Lenox, 74; Grafton, 70; Elizabeth, 64; Weymouth, York, Panther, Medway and America, 60; Falmouth and Chatham, 50; Argo and Liverpool, 28; Seaford and Seahorse and Baleine, 20; South Sea Castle, 24. The personnel amounted to 5,840.

<sup>3</sup> Argo, 28; Dolphin, 24; Tamar, 16.

<sup>4</sup> For further details of the Marine, see Appendix I.

the only establishment in these waters, with the exception of the Portuguese Royal Yard at Goa, at which large repairs could be made. There alone were the masts and other stores for the squadron deposited ; and without that yard at the disposal of the Navy the maintenance of the squadron in the Eastern seas would have been an impossibility.<sup>1</sup>

For the next two years the East Indies squadron remained in abeyance, not because there was peace in the East, for peace there was not, but because there were no European enemies, and the Bombay Marine with its 20-gun " capital ships " could deal with the navies of the Country Powers, both Mahratta and Mysorean.

In the war that raged through southern India from 1767 to 1769 against the new power of Hyder Ali the sea played no important part. One small expedition was sent in 1768 by water from Bombay, to capture Hyder's ports and shipping. Mangalore and Onore were taken, together with all of Hyder's ships. " We have taken all his fleet," wrote the Governor of Bombay to Lord Clive, " consisting of the Beckenham, about 10 grabs and 30 gallivats, so that it will be many years before he can be formidable at sea." The sea-borne trade of the Company was secured by this destruction of the enemy's ships ; but the Company's forts, penuriously left with small garrisons, fell an easy prey to Hyder who recaptured them shortly after. After being misconducted in almost every possible way by the Madras Council the war ended in April 1769 with Hyder practically dictating terms at the Gates of Madras.<sup>2</sup>

While this war was in progress a new shadow was beginning to loom over the peace of India. By the terms of the Treaty<sup>3</sup> of Paris, France had been forbidden to maintain troops or erect fortifications in any part of Bengal ; and she had agreed

<sup>1</sup> The remarks of Sir E. Hughes on the importance of Bombay have a peculiar significance. *Vide* Appendix IX.

<sup>2</sup> Fortescue, *op. cit.* vol. iii, chap. v.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide*, ante, p. 33.

to recognise as ruler of Arcot the British nominee, Mohammed Ali. These stipulations removed any reasons for her to interfere in Indian politics or to maintain any forces in the East larger than the actual defence of her settlements necessarily demanded. But during 1768 rumours began to be received of French intrigues in various parts of India, and these were accompanied by reports of increases of garrisons, and, what was of great moment, of the arrival of many troops and much shipping at the naval base, Mauritius. Coinciding as this did with the war with Hyder, the Committee of the East India Company grew anxious. "The reduction of Hyder Ali, as Lord Clive observes, must sooner or later be effected as the only means of giving peace to the Carnatic and stability to the Company's possessions. He may at a favourable opportunity, or in some future war, take the French by the hand to re-establish their affairs, which cannot fail being productive of the worst consequences to your possessions on this coast." The Company pointed out that Hyder could supply the money, while the French, at this very moment, had troops in numbers at the Islands.<sup>1</sup> Clive had indeed good reasons for his opinion. His old antagonist, de Bussy, is reported to have said to him that the English could not "flatter themselves to remain the absolute masters of Indostan." The other European Powers—France, Holland and Denmark—would not remain content with any such a monopoly: while since the French Eastern Trade had been thrown open by the abolition of their Company's privileges, adventurers would be ready to assist the country Princes with armies to recover their territories. "Believe me, my Lord, we have not given up India: our claims lie dormant at present and we shall lay them when we can assert them with the sword."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee, Madras, to Board of Directors, April 2nd, 1768. *Home Misc.* 99.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Caracciola, vol. ii, pp. 405-7, in Sir George Forrest's *Life of Lord Clive*, vol. ii, pp. 364-5.

The reports had assumed a sufficiently definite form in November 1768, for Lord Weymouth, the Secretary of State who then dealt with the affairs of India, to call on the Company for precise information of the strength of the French forces in India and of any attempts or activities which appeared to be aimed at the extension of their settlements. He was clearly dissatisfied with the extent to which the Company kept the Government informed. He suspected that they were not only maintaining no adequate system of procuring intelligence, but were also relaxing the stringency of the terms of Art. XI of the Treaty of Paris, "the importance of which," he writes, "is too obvious not to make His Majesty extremely jealous of the least attempt to infringe it."

The Company proved able to give very little information, and that uncertain. The French were reported to have 4,000 troops at the Islands, whither ships, probably intended for transports, were also being sent. The naval strength was unknown; but the Directors in India were very anxious. "So alarming a force at a place from whence it is very difficult to procure the least information of their designs has induced us to have a vigilant eye over our fortifications. . . . It requires no great depth of judgment to foresee that the assembling such a great number of forces at the French Islands can bode no good to your settlements in India. Nor are we without our apprehensions that when the French are in a condition to cope with our nation in Europe, they will make some attempt in India; and even this may happen previous to a declaration of war. And as from the situation of the Islands they are masters of their own time and operations, it is more than probable that the first intelligence of their intention will be the appearance of a French fleet in Ballasore Road."<sup>1</sup> They followed this with another letter ten weeks later, reiterating their declara-

<sup>1</sup> Council of Fort William to Directors, May 2nd, 1769. *Home Misc.* 100.



tion that they felt " at all times in danger from the French " ; and concluded in expressing the hope that a naval strength sufficient to protect them against the attempts of France might be granted them.<sup>1</sup> Two frigates and a sloop<sup>2</sup> had already been ordered for service in the East Indies under Captain Sir John Lindsay. The Directors now asked that this might further be strengthened by two ships of the line.

Sir John Lindsay had been appointed not only as Commander-in-Chief. He had also the duty of making enquiry into certain of the Company's doings. The principal investigation was, however, to be conducted by a second commission, consisting of Mr. H. Vansittart, Luke Scrutton and Francis Forde, who were to sail in the *Aurora*, which was to examine into the conduct of the Company's servants abroad. The *Aurora*, however, was lost at sea with all hands between the Cape and Bombay, and it was left to the naval commander to make such investigation as was possible : a task which, even if he had received any assistance from the local authorities, would have been a sufficiently formidable one. Not only, however, did he get no help, but he was refused information at every turn.

Lindsay's general instructions, dated September 13th, 1769, were issued by the Secretary of State. He was told that the East India Company had asked for naval support in consequence of the threat from France and the wars with Country Powers in which they were involved ; misfortunes due, thought Lord Weymouth, to infringements by the Company of engagements made by the King. Contrary to the XIth Article of the Treaty of Paris, they had allowed French troops to be put into Chandernagore, a wall to be built there and cannon to be put in place, thus making concessions without

<sup>1</sup> July 22nd, 1769. *Home Misc.* 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Stag*, 32 (dated June 12th, 1769), and *Aurora*, 32 (July 13th, 1769). *Entry Books*, 323.

the King's authority. They had not, as they should have done, kept the Secretary of State informed concerning the growth of French military forces ; and again, contrary to treaty, they had imposed restrictions upon French trade. They appeared to have treated the Nabob of Arcot improperly ; to have made war for their own profit ; and to propose, at this moment, to extend their own possessions by forming a settlement in Borneo. " I am sorry to add," wrote the Secretary of State, " that the servants of the Company both at home and abroad, are too much taken up with partial and selfish schemes to admit the liberal and large consideration of Indian affairs which includes the good of the whole."

While enquiry into these faults of omission and commission on the part of the Company formed a part of Lindsay's duties, his squadron was also being sent on account of the suspicions raised by the reported action of the French. Professing friendship, and disclaiming any intention of disturbing the peace in India, their actions appeared to belie their words ; and the great secrecy maintained as to all that was within the harbour of Mauritius afforded small grounds for assurance. Reports had also been received of trouble fomented in the Mahratta country, and of encouragement given to Hyder Ali by French agents, all of which pointed to a possibility of hostile action on the part of France. In view of all these circumstances, said Lord Weymouth, " it would appear improper not to suspect that something of that sort was intended." To enable him to carry out these enquiries, Lindsay was given full powers of a Plenipotentiary, while, besides being Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Squadron in the East, he was given a commission to command the Marine forces of the Company when actually engaged in hostilities.

To the Company's request to add two ships of the line to the frigate detachment Lord Weymouth would not accede

without some guarantees as to their employment. He was by no means inclined to place forces in the pay of the Crown at the unfettered disposal of the Company. In reply to their request he asked whether the Court of Directors would give the King's officer a share in the deliberations on peace and war. A long discussion in the Directors' Court ended in a definite refusal to give any such position to the naval commander. Under no circumstances would the Directors give him either a seat in Council when matters of peace or war were deliberated, or even a share with the servants of the Company in discussions on the operations of war. They expressed themselves to be prepared to direct the supreme council at Calcutta to "consult and advise with the Commander-in-Chief" when warlike operations were under deliberation. But beyond allowing him to give advice they would allow him no other powers even though His Majesty's ships might be employed.

Lord Weymouth esteemed these stipulations totally unsatisfactory. He considered the position proposed for his Majesty's representative, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, would be invidious and impossible. At the beck and call of the Directors, only permitted to advise if they chose to call upon him and unable to have any part in the decision, the King's Commander would become no less than a servant of this private Company—a Company in whose behaviour towards the Country Powers no confidence could be reposed. He refused, therefore, to make any addition to the proposed squadron : and it will be seen that, when at a later date it became plainly necessary to send a reinforcement of ships of the line, a clause was inserted in the Commander's instructions, to safeguard the squadron against employment in which the King's forces might be used to support a policy out of conformity with the wishes or engagements of the Government.<sup>1</sup> If war were to be undertaken, His Majesty's Commander-in-Chief must be satisfied, before he employed

<sup>1</sup> *Vide*, post, p. 54.

the squadron in operations, that the war was justifiable and politic ; for there was only too much reason to doubt that the recent wars of the Company were neither the one nor the other.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that one of the reasons for the re-establishment of the Royal Squadron in the East Indies was the report of the growth of French naval and military strength at Mauritius, and the anxiety created, first in the minds of the Company and then in those of the Ministry at home, for the security of the national and of the Company's interests in India. There were solid grounds for this anxiety. Two months had hardly elapsed after the signature of the Peace of Paris when, on April 7th, Louis XV gave orders for the preparation of a comprehensive plan of war with England. For four years, under the direction of the able Comte de Broglie, an intensive study was made of the problem. The Duc de Choiseul, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs and War in 1766, followed up this investigation, while his cousin, the Comte de Praslin, worked assiduously for the regeneration of the Navy. The conclusion to which all these investigations led was that the principal object of France in any war with England should be to crush her by invasion. For that invasion, command in the Channel was the essential preliminary. The united forces of France and Spain, if concentrated to the highest degree practicable, were calculated not to possess the superiority necessary to obtain this command. In order, therefore, to bring about such a weakening of the British fleet in home waters as would give the superiority required, diversions in the outer seas were proposed. Among these was a threat against India from Mauritius, whither a strong squadron was to be sent in the expectation of drawing away a number greater than its

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, in 1784, referred to the discretion thus allowed him, in relation to relieving Mangalore against the investing forces of Tippoo Sahib, as it would involve operations which he considered were not in conformity with the terms of peace.

own from home waters.<sup>1</sup> How far any of these plans were actually approved is uncertain ; but according to information procured in Mauritius in 1771, the plans had been developed by Choiseul, assisted by Law, the Governor of Pondicherry, and Chevalier, the Governor of Chandernagore : and de Bussy was also consulted in 1770. The armament had been in the building during 1768, 1769 and 1770. By then the establishments were almost completed. Mauritius was transferred to the Crown in 1769, at the same time that the French East India Company was dissolved and the trade with India and China thrown open to all French subjects. The fortifications of Port Louis were strengthened and the harbour improved, while funds were provided from the Royal Treasury to develop agriculture in order to render the island capable of supporting not only its inhabitants but also a greatly increased naval and military personnel. Emissaries, as the British had learned, were actively engaged in stirring up the Country Powers, and it was known that a correspondence was being conducted with Hyder Ali, Surajah Dowlah and the Nizam. In order secretly to accumulate shipping for transport at Mauritius, French merchants in India were allowed in 1770 to load for Europe, but on reaching Mauritius on their homeward voyage the ships were unloaded and detained and taken into service for collecting provisions from the Cape and Madagascar ; while an embargo was laid upon neutral shipping which was not removed until October 1771. Preparations were made to increase the military forces to fourteen regiments of infantry, several of which were actually despatched. The intention was —so it was reported—to land 20,000 troops at Pondicherry in July or August 1771. There they were to be joined by Hyder

<sup>1</sup> For many particulars concerning these and later plans, vide Lacour-Gayet, *La Marine militaire de la France sous Louis XV* ; Captain Castex, *Les Idées militaires de la Marine du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle* ; P. Coquelle, "Projets de descente en Angleterre," in the *Revue d'Histoire diplomatique*, Nos. 3 and 4 of 1901, No. 1 of 1902 ; the various works referred by M. Lacour Gayet ; and Admiral Castex's *Théories Stratégiques*, vol. ii.

with 10,000 horse and some 20,000 infantry. By June of that year the Regiments of Clare, the 1st Battalion of Artois, the 2nd of Normandie and some companies of artillery had reached the Island. The squadron was to consist of ten ships of the line.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the account which eventually reached the Company in 1772. Much of it appears to have been exaggerated ; and obviously, it had neither fully developed, nor could be known, in 1769. What was known then was that French troops, in considerable numbers and certainly in excess of the force needed purely for the defence of the Islands or the settlements in India, were being assembled at Mauritius : that a profound secrecy was observed as to their movements ; and that men of war had gone eastward and had not returned to Europe.

Commodore Lindsay sailed from Portsmouth in September 1769. At the Cape he gathered some further information, from various sources, as to the state of affairs at Mauritius. Besides the local troops—some 3,000 regimented men—there were also between 3,500 and 4,500 regular troops. The arsenals were full of stores, and all outward-bound vessels carried, in addition to their mercantile cargoes, quantities of naval and military material. An ample supply of such essentials as spare masts, anchors, cable and shot was available, while powder was manufactured locally, saltpetre being procured from India. The shipbuilders' resources enabled vessels of from 24 to 36 guns to be built ; and there was a very numerous body of shipwrights and artificers. The squadron was reported to consist of eight men-of-war and armed vessels of from 64 to 20 guns—a force clearly capable of crushing rapidly the two British frigates then on their way and such armed vessels as the Company could provide.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of Captain Lockhart Russel to the East India Company, dated July 24th, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> The ships reported by Lindsay were : the King's ships—Garonne, 64 ; Africa and Ambulance, 36 ; Vigilante, 20 ; and the Company ships—Grand Choiseul, 64 ; Utile and Paix, 54 ; Moras, 44. The names do not appear accurate : but this was the situation as represented to the Admiralty and upon which it fell to them to act.

This information Lindsay transmitted at once to London, where it arrived in June 1770. It corresponded with what had been received from other sources ; and this, combined with the news of intrigues in India, of the fosse being dug at Chandernagore, and with the general situation in India, and consequently the opportunities which presented themselves caused Lord Weymouth's remark that "it would be improper not to suspect that something of that sort was intended"<sup>1</sup>—"that sort" being forcible interference in the Carnatic or the Mahratta country. Nevertheless, it was not considered necessary to take any immediate steps to reinforce the squadron, and Lindsay was reminded that his semi-diplomatic mission was the primarily important part of his duty.

The Commodore reached India in the middle of 1770. The situation there then was one of some difficulty. The problems of the Company's relations with the Country Powers appear to have no connection with, or dependence upon, naval force ; but the facts that there were at Mauritius a French squadron with a considerable land force capable of being thrown into whichever scale might be chosen, and that there appeared to be a strong inclination to seize a favourable opportunity for restoring French power in India, introduced factors in the local policy in which naval power was very closely concerned.

In the Carnatic there were two Powers : the Nabob of Arcot and the Company. The Nabob ruled his own territory, under the supreme but nominal rule of Shah Allum. The Company possessed the remaining large territories and privileges granted it by the Nabob. In Mysore ruled Hyder Ali, the Nabob's old enemy, who had supported the French claimant in the earlier struggle, and who himself put forward claims to territory in the Carnatic. He had heretofore been looked upon as the inveterate enemy of the Company, but

<sup>1</sup> Lord Weymouth to Lindsay, June 28th, 1770, India Office. *Home Misc.* 103.

in the previous year—1769—a Treaty of Alliance had been made with him against the Mahrattas. To this Treaty the Nabob of Arcot had refused to be a party, not only on account of his friendship with the Mahrattas but also because he feared them and wanted peace. He did not wish to be dragged, as he foresaw he would be dragged, by the Company into war, whereby, as he had been before, he would again be involved in expenses to pay for wars in which, while he suffered, he gained nothing, not even security.

To the north lay the Northern Circars, taken from the Nizam in 1766. With the Nizam as ally the Company had fought Hyder in 1768. The Nizam had deserted the Company during the war and joined the Mysorean, but on being defeated had rejoined the Company. He was thus a man in whom no dependence could be placed, and at this moment he was believed to be in correspondence with the French and ready to furnish troops and money to assist them against the Company. His brother, Bazalat Jung, possessed territory marching with that of the Company and was believed only to await an opportunity to act against it.

While such was the situation in the South and East, in the West and North was the confederation of the Mahrattas, with their capital at Poonah, under the leadership of Mahadarao. They formed the strongest power in India, and with them also a Treaty of mutual support had been concluded in such terms as to give the Mahrattas a reason for assuming that they could claim the help of the Company against Hyder. The Company, on the other hand, feared them, and believed them to aspire to the conquest of the whole of India.

War between Hyder Ali and the Mahrattas broke out in November 1770. Both Hyder and the Peshwa called for the support of the Company, in virtue of the Treaty of 1769. This placed the Company in the inconvenient situation of making a choice as to which of two parties, each of whom it



had engaged to support, it should render its aid. The Mahratta request for help was accompanied by a hardly veiled threat of invasion of the Carnatic in the case of refusal; but to help the Mahrattas was to place those whom the Company regarded as a most dangerous power in undisputed superiority in India. Hyder might certainly be put out of the way, but the result of crushing him would be that they themselves would be the next. On the other hand Hyder, as all their information showed, had been coquetting with the French; and the news received just after Lindsay reached Madras, of the arrival of another French 64 with five transports carrying 2,000 troops, whose destination was the Carnatic, gave a hint of a probability of French intervention.

The inclination of the Company, notwithstanding Clive's dictum, was to support Hyder. Lindsay, with his eye on the French at Mauritius, took a different view. He urged friendship with the Mahrattas, for not only were they the more powerful confederation, but were also the natural enemies of the Country Powers friendly to the French, and had hitherto shown a constant preference in all their ports to the English.

The Company, unwilling to support either and fearing the results of victory to whichever party it might fall, temporised: they remained neutral. The results were that Hyder was beaten; that the Mahratta Power was brought closer to the Carnatic by cession to them of territory from Mysore; that the victorious Mahrattas were incensed at the refusal to help them; and that Hyder, smarting under defeat, was further confirmed in his enmity to the Company: an enmity which the presence of the French armaments at Mauritius afforded a prospect of gratifying.

In the meantime the continuous reports of French reorganisation at sea and of the reinforcement of their outer commands, led the Admiralty to represent that the security of the Colonies and Plantations could not be pro-

vided for on the peace establishment of 16,000 men voted in 1763. This, they said, did not furnish men enough to man such ships as the defence of the Colonies and other distant services required, especially as no provision was made in that establishment for the squadron in the East Indies which had now been added, and to which further additions would now be called for in consequence of the information of the French force at the Mauritius. To furnish squadrons abroad adequate for security would call for a peace establishment of 25,000 men, and this too would suffice, they reported, "only for a time of perfect peace." The complements of Lindsay's squadron amounted to 735 men. This it was proposed to increase to 2,305 men, manning a squadron of three ships of 70 guns, one of 50, one of 32 and two sloops. Similar increases were recommended for the West Indies and North America. This could partly be met by a reduction of one ship in the Mediterranean, and putting skeleton crews on the barest scale into the guardships at home—crews which would enable them to put to sea with some degree of despatch, so soon as men could be raised, if circumstances should make it necessary.

To replace the lost *Aurora* another 24-gun frigate, the *Dolphin*, was sent to India: but before any further action had been taken by the Admiralty, the Falkland Islands dispute put the question of peace establishments into the background. The relations with Spain on this matter became so acute in September 1770 that an immediate armament was called for. On September 19th orders were given to fit out twenty ships of the line. War now appeared inevitable. Choiseul's opportunity seemed to have come, for the forces in the Indian seas had been brought up very nearly to the numbers his plans demanded. A French alliance which could offer either Hyder or the Mahrattas an army of even 3,000 men, and a squadron so vastly superior to the British that the safe transport of the troops to India was absolutely

assured, was one that could only be welcomed, and bid for, by both of the Country Powers.

The obvious possibility that France might join Spain in this favourable opportunity led to orders being given in December to fit out fifteen more ships of the line with proportionate frigates and four fire ships. At the same time the action which the Company should take if war broke out was made clear. They had, through their Secret Committee, recommended that the best defence of India lay in an immediate capture of the French settlements, thus both destroying the existing armed forces on land and depriving the enemy of the ports and facilities required for disembarking others. This action, Lord Weymouth informed the Company, had the King's approval, so soon as war should be declared.<sup>1</sup> It would deprive the enemy of the means of attacking the British settlements, besides giving them no anchorage or base for their fleet if it should go thither, as it probably would, from the Mauritius. Every preparation was therefore at once to be made for the immediate capture of Pondicherry and any other French settlements which, as places of strength, were worth attention: and relations with the Country Powers were to be composed, so that no disagreements should exist of which the French could avail themselves. The small British squadron under Lindsay was to co-operate in whatever operation should be decided upon, and a reinforcement both of ships and of land artillery was being pressed forward.

The danger, however, passed. Choiseul fell, his policy at all its points meeting with dissatisfaction. His naval and colonial policy had brought France into antagonism with England over India; his Near Eastern policy had brought Russia and England against her<sup>2</sup>; and—possibly not the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Weymouth to E.I. Co. Directors, December 7th, 1770. *Home Misc.* 102.

<sup>2</sup> In 1770 a Russian fleet appeared in the Mediterranean, with hostile intention towards Turkey. Choiseul prepared to send a French fleet to destroy it, as he desired no maritime rival in the Mediterranean. Britain interfered, stating that action against Russia would be considered an act of war against herself.

least influential—his domestic policy had brought him into conflict with Madame du Barry. Spain could not hope for success without the help of France, and her feelings being soothed by the influences of the able British Minister at Madrid, peace was preserved.

## CHAPTER II

### GROWTH OF THE SQUADRON, 1771-1774

ALTHOUGH the immediate danger of war with France was dispelled by the spring of 1771, and the crisis came to an end, the Falkland Islands dispute had shown that war might break out at some unexpected time. Choiseul, with his sustained policy of antagonism to England, was gone; but he left behind him as a legacy the policy of building up a strong naval and military force in the East Indies. Thus the return of the British fleet to its normal peace establishment was marked by one difference. India was no longer to be left exposed. The reinforcement of four ships for which the East India Company had pressed, and the Admiralty had proposed in their letter of March 1st, 1770, was now ordered to be sent thither; and Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Harland was appointed to command them.<sup>1</sup>

Harland's instructions, dated March 19th, 1771, gave him the same plenipotentiary powers as those given to Lindsay: but he was warned<sup>2</sup> that those powers were limited to ensuring the observance of the terms of the Treaty of Paris, and were not to be understood in the wide sense in which Lindsay had interpreted them. "Sir John Lindsay," wrote Lord Rochford, "whose diligence and zeal to procure His Majesty full information of the state of affairs in India deserves commendation, is thought to have advanced rather too far in calling in an authoritative manner for the state of the transactions of the Governor and Council with the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Rochford to the Admiralty, January 5th, 1771, I. O. Records. *Home Misc.* 105.

<sup>2</sup> In later instructions from Lord Rochford, April 26th, 1771, I. O. *Home Misc.* 109.

Nabobs, so as to give them the idea of his having a censorial authority: that he has not rightly understood the extent of the full powers given to him in supposing them to authorise him generally to make treaties which might in his opinion tend to preserve peace in India: whereas they are confined to the observance of the stipulations in the 11th Article of the definitive Treaty." He was told that the French had greatly increased their force at the Islands since 1770, among the increases being the whole Regiment of Clare, 900 strong; and that it was believed in India that the French intended, in alliance with Hyder, to establish the son of their old protégé, Chunder Sahib, on the throne of Arcot. "The miserable situation of France in Europe, as well in point of finances as in every other respect, should incline one to think," wrote Lord Weymouth, "that they are not likely to be very enterprising in India. Yet as mischiefs are much easier prevented than remedied, it will be proper for you, in case a greater number of forces should be landed by the French on the coast of Coromandel than can be looked upon as a garrison for Pondicherry, to remonstrate with the Commander-in-Chief on the tendency which such a step may have to interrupt the good harmony between the two Courts"; for the step in question must be held to indicate an intention to use the troops to intervene in the local Indian wars. Harland's attention was also called to the insecurity of Bombay, the small extent of whose territory rendered it unable to support itself upon its own scanty resources.<sup>1</sup> It was considered desirable that the settlement should be made self-supporting and to this end Harland was to endeavour to negotiate the transfer to the Company of Salsette and Bassein. It was the desire for the possession of these places that led to the unfortunate Mahratta war of 1775, as desires for security have so often formed the springs of offensive action and conquest.

<sup>1</sup> Bombay, as it will be seen later, was a spot towards which both Suffren and de Bussy proposed directing their first attacks.

In addition to these instructions from Lord Weymouth, Harland was given another set, under the King's own signature. In these he was accorded what had been denied to Lindsay by the Directors—authority to “assist at such Councils as the Company shall appoint to deliberate upon the measures of Peace and War with the Indian Powers, giving your best advice on these occasions.” When measures should be agreed upon, the squadron was to be used to put them into execution, with the very precise qualification “so far as they are consistent with His Majesty's engagements expressed in the eleventh Article of the Treaty of Paris and in the declaration annexed with regard to the limits of Bengal.” As no European Power appeared to be engaged in the troubles between the Company and the Indian Princes, Harland was directed cautiously to avoid whatever might be construed as an act of hostility against the possessions or subjects of any European Power. But as the French were reputed by the last advices from India to have landed 1,200 men at Pondicherry, he was to “observe them carefully.” As in the case of Lindsay, he was directed to correspond with, and receive his orders from, His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Southern Department.

Harland sailed with his squadron<sup>1</sup> on March 25th, 1771. A bare month later, when the French and Spanish Ambassadors declared their readiness to disarm as soon as the British should do so, the Admiralty was ordered by the Secretary of State<sup>2</sup> to reduce to a peace establishment on that basis of a standing force of 25,000 men which the Admiralty had proposed in March 1770. As this force included the squadron of capital ships for the East Indies, Harland was unaffected by the change: he continued on his voyage to India and anchored off Fort St. George on September 2nd, 1771.

The belief that the French had prepared a plan for an attack in force in India received some further confirmation

<sup>1</sup> Northumberland, Oxford, Buckingham, 70; Warwick, 50.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Rochford to Admiralty, April 23rd, 1771. *Entry Books* 232.

during August 1771, in a paper which reached the hands of Lord Rochford, containing a copy of a plan for an attack upon our settlements which "he had reason to think" was adopted by Choiseul. Although he expected that Choiseul's fall and the settlement of the Spanish dispute would have provided a change in policy and a countermanding of these plans, still Lord Rochford could not but think that such things might recur; and the presence of a British squadron would be a steadying influence. In informing Harland of this plan, the Minister gave him an assurance that a careful attention would be given to any forces the French might despatch; and that his own should never be allowed to be inferior. This expectation that counter orders would be sent to the French in Mauritius proved correct, for a despatch vessel arrived at Mauritius on January 13th, 1772, bringing orders for a reduction of the squadron and troops.

In the plan for an attack from India which came into Lord Weymouth's hands the French expedition was reported to be timed to arrive in India in August or September 1771. Information which Harland received when he arrived in the latter month convinced him that the French would be forced either to come very soon or return to Europe; for the islands were unable to support so many men for more than a very short time.<sup>1</sup> As it would be impossible for them to begin operations until January, when the force of the monsoon was spent, he determined to drop down to and winter in the Dutch port of Trincomali, the only harbour on the East of India and Ceylon where a ship could lie during the monsoon. To go round to Bombay, according to custom, at this season, would expose the coast to attack at the very moment when it was most probable and, as the passage from thence occupied some four to six weeks, he could not return in time to prevent a landing. He therefore decided to defer his refitting until the following year and to content himself with scrubbing the ships' bottoms and making such

<sup>1</sup> See post, p. 122, on the dependence of Mauritius on external supplies.



a refit at Trincomali as the stores he carried on board would admit. Thither he went before the monsoon broke.

Harland's duties, like those of Lindsay, were very largely diplomatic. "The great objects of your instructions," wrote Rochford, "are the reconciliation of the unhappy differences between the Nabob and the Company's servants as far as lies in your power, and the transmitting to His Majesty the fullest information of the transactions in India, with your own opinion both with regard to the internal economy and administration of the Company's servants and their dealing with the Country Powers." Matters were in so ill a condition that a Parliamentary commission would be required to deal with the whole question of Government. His position became evidently one of extreme difficulty; for while he was thus ordered to render full accounts of all that went on in the political sphere, he did not possess powers to enable him to obtain the information from the only reliable source—the Council of Government. Thus, as Harland was quickly to discover, it was possible for the Government flatly to refuse, as they had refused Lindsay, to give any information concerning their transactions, and any co-operation in negotiations or with troops which he might propose. The result was that, unable to procure what he was ordered to procure from the Government, he sought his information in other sources, in particular, the Nabob of Arcot, with the result that his opinions were strongly tinged with those of Mohammed Ali.

In Harland's view, the dominating factor in Indian affairs was the interdependence of the French and the Country Powers. On February 14th, 1772, he outlined the situation as he saw it in broad terms.

"As our views ought to be ultimately directed to preserve the national interest in India, and as a war with France, considering their present strength at Mauritius, might prove the most destructive to the British influence in this country, guarding against them ought to make a very material

consideration in all our Indian politics. Europeans landed here, even though very numerous, without the assistance of a Country Power, would find so many difficulties that no great mischief could be apprehended from them. Deprive the French of this resource and there would be little cause to apprehend any danger from their armament at the islands. I do not think that there is the least cause to doubt their good understanding with Hyder Ali, and I likewise think there is great reason to fear the disposition of the Rajah of Tanjore, so that the Malabar coast is open to them. As much country as Hyder commands would be at their disposal to the Westward. The Tanjore Dominions could supply them both with cavalry, provisions, and even money, to the Southward; and the Circar in possession of Bazalat Jung, who is a certain friend to the French, would give an opening to them to the Northward."

Thus, a French force of European troops, if it could be transported from Mauritius, would have a wide choice of landing places from Onore on the West Coast to the Southern Circars on the East; and it might be joined by the forces of several Powers who could furnish land transport, cavalry and money. But so long as the British squadron was superior at sea there would be very little danger, though "sound policy would direct every possible attempt in our power to balance such a probability of Country interests against us"; and he strongly advocated an alliance with the Mahrattas to counteract those Powers which were known to be in favour of the French. "The Mahrattas are the only Power in India capable of doing this, and they have offered it; and the very conditions which they require in their favour are so far in favour of the English that it may for ever put it out of the power of the most formidable Sirdar in the Peninsula to hurt them by ruining the power of Hyder Ali."<sup>1</sup> The conditions Harland referred to were that the Mahrattas should give up the Ghauts and the

<sup>1</sup> Harland to Lord Rochford, February 14th, 1772. *Home Misc.* 109.

country within them to the Nabob, forgo demands to Choul and the Circars, give the British the trading rights now afforded by Hyder, give up such sea-ports in Bednore to the Company as might be agreed upon, and assist the British against the French, in case of war, with 20,000 men. Taking into consideration the importance of the influence of French sea and land power in the Indian situation, the advantage of these conditions is undeniable.

Obviously, the best security would have been in such a superiority at sea as would put the transport and disembarkation of troops from Mauritius out of the question; but Harland did not feel that he possessed such a superiority. According to his information the French squadron in the islands consisted of not less than five 64-gun ships<sup>1</sup> and six, or possibly four, frigates, and the French military forces of no less than 7,000 men, for whose transport there was sufficient merchant shipping. With so wide a choice as to the point of disembarkation—limited though it was by the monsoons for much of the year—his force of four heavy ships<sup>2</sup> could not ensure successful resistance to an attempt to land this army in India.

These views he laid before the Select Committee of Madras. They, pointedly ignoring him in his capacity as Plenipotentiary, addressed him solely in that of Commander-in-Chief, and declined, notwithstanding the powers he carried and his instructions received from the King, to call him to Council when the services of the Royal Squadron might be required. They coldly informed him that they intended to assist Hyder against the Mahrattas, who threatened them with invasion, and requested him to take the squadron at once to the Malabar coast, there to attack the Mahrattas, to draw their attention away from the Carnatic.

<sup>1</sup> *Actionnaire*, *Union*, *Mars*, *Indienne*, *Hector*, 64; *Fortune*, 30; *La Roche*, *Dragon*, *Nours* (?) 24 or 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Northumberland*, *Oxford*, *Buckingham*, 70; *Warwick*, 50; *Stag*, 32; *Dolphin*, 24; *Hawke*, 10; *Swallow*, 14.

Harland definitely refused to accede to this absurd proposal. "Considering the great strength of the French at the Mauritius, which made the squadron winter on the coast, and the uncertainty with respect to their intentions and designs, I am astonished they should even think of applying for His Majesty's ships to make war on the Mahrattas on the Malabar coast until it became absolutely necessary and every other remedy had been tried in vain, to leave their own coast naked and defenceless, and by that single act to ensure the total destruction of the Carnatic, which might have been completely effected before the squadron could have appeared on the Malabar coast." Even the destruction of the whole naval force of the Mahrattas,<sup>1</sup> and all the impression that could have been made on their country, would have been but a small and inadequate recompense either to the nation or to the Company for the loss the British influence might have suffered from the French on the coast of Coromandel.<sup>2</sup>

Apart even from exposing the coast to French attack, operations against the Mahratta shipping would certainly have precipitated war on land, which of all things was to be avoided.

While the Select Committee of Madras was advocating this policy and these ridiculous measures at sea, the Council at Bombay was preparing to send a force to Mangalore, with the object of marching on Seringapatam to assist Hyder

<sup>1</sup> The Mahratta Navy consisted of 5 grabs, 13 ketch grabs and 100 gallivats, generally stationed as follows :

3 grabs and 20 gallivats at	. Bassein and Salsette.
1       "       5       "       .	. Severndroog.
14       "       50 or 60 gallivats at	Gheriah.
5 gallivats at	. Choul.
5       "       .	. Dabai.

Each grab ship carried 150 sepoy, a ketch grab 100, and a gallivat 75. The Company's Marine was capable of dealing with the whole of this Navy. *Home Misc.* 112.

<sup>2</sup> Harland to Lord Rochford, February 14th, 1772. *Home Misc.* 109.

Ali against his Mahratta enemies. If it be remembered that one of the aims of the Bombay Presidency was to render Bombay self-supporting by the acquisition of Bassein and Salsette, and that Harland had been directed to endeavour to negotiate the transfer of these places to the Company, the course of action intended by the Bombay Presidency can only be considered to be at complete variance with the object they desired.

If war with the Mahrattas, with the object of procuring Salsette and Bassein, were intended, the Company would have had better hopes of attaining their end by concentrating their efforts on those two objectives and conducting a war with the limited object of the capture of the islands, than by assisting Hyder. They would have been fighting close to their base, with short communications and concentrated forces, instead of at a great distance in Seringapatam, in the heart of Mysore, whither Hyder had now retreated. If assistance to Hyder were among their objects, they would, if their attack upon the Islands were opposed, be procuring a diversion of the Mahratta forces in his favour. Their marine forces would be similarly concentrated, and able first to destroy the opposition of the weak Mahratta Navy and then easily to furnish those communications by sea which the nature of the operations of the campaign would require.

In brief, Harland was convinced that the policy was wrong. It failed wholly to take into consideration the essential factor of the situation—the French armament; and it was to be supported by measures contradictory to sound principles. Nor did he fail strongly to resent the assumption by the Company of powers over the King's squadron and their attitude towards the King's Officer. "The Squadron," he wrote, "was intended by them to act solely and entirely under their direction without either consulting or even deigning to acquaint His Majesty's Officer with either the expediency of the war or the mode of conducting the very share he was to have in it."

The Madras Committee, ignoring Harland's protests as to policy, demanded, in peremptory terms, whether he intended to comply with their requisition to send the squadron to attack the Mahrattas? To this he bluntly replied that he did not. He was not their servant or their officer; and as a King's Officer he intended in his character as Plenipotentiary to open negotiations with the Peshwa with a view to a national alliance, proposing a complete cessation of hostilities between the English, the Nabob and the Mahratta Power until the King's pleasure should be known. Peace, he reminded them, was their interest and his object. He was ready to support the real interests of the Company, but he must first be assured, as he still was not, that the policy proposed was in those interests. Regretting that his views conflicted with those of the Madras Committee, he could not leave out of consideration the engagements of the hour. "When I assist at such Councils as the East India Company appoint to deliberate upon measures of peace and war with the Indian Powers I shall most certainly give my best advice on those occasions. And when such Councils shall have agreed upon the proper measures to be pursued, I shall have no objection to make use of the force under my command in order to carry those measures into execution as far as they are consistent with the 11th Article of the Treaty of Paris."

Thus the relations of the Admiral and the Madras Committee were far from satisfactory. This was due in a large measure to the refusal of the Committee, jealous in maintaining their prerogative, to give Harland any information as to the reason for their action. They gave him no confidence. They regarded him as a meddler in their affairs for whose interference there was no justification in the terms of their Charter; and they carried their reticence so far as to refuse even to call upon him for an opinion in matters relating to operations of war at sea.

Nevertheless, neither the Madras nor the Bombay Government carried out its expressed intention of assisting Hyder ; and he was crushed by the Mahrattas.

In the meanwhile Lindsay had reached England, and on his arrival he had given the Secretary of State the latest information from the Cape and India. He had attempted to call at Mauritius but had not been allowed to enter the harbour, but such intelligence as he could obtain elsewhere confirmed the presence of not less than four 64-gun ships and some frigates<sup>1</sup> ; and a report from France, dated early in 1772, which indicated that two more of the line<sup>2</sup> had sailed for the East Indies, caused the Secretary of State to order a corresponding reinforcement to be fitted out and sent out to Harland with all despatch.<sup>3</sup> This would give him a number equal to that of the French, as it was reported by Lindsay.

It is clear that the report of Choiseul's preparations had induced a state of great anxiety in London. A constant watch was kept upon every movement made and of all sailings from France, although after the fall of Choiseul the Ministry felt there were no grounds for believing an attack to be imminent. " We have all the reason to be satisfied that India is still their great object, that they mean to make the islands a place of arms, and to keep up a large force

<sup>1</sup> Actionnaire, Indienne, Union, Mars, 64 ; Africa and Seine (flûtes), 32 ; Croissant, 24 ; Mascarenhas, 30 ; Brune, 20 and 11 other ships. Troops: Regts. of Normandie, 900 ; Royal Artois, 900 ; Royal Courtois, 1,800 ; Clare, 900. Total: Regulars, 4,500 ; Legion, 3,000 ; White Militia, 1,200 ; Black Militia, 500.

<sup>2</sup> Dauphin Royal, 70 ; Brave, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Prudent 64 and Intrepid 64. Sailed April 1772. On January 29th Parliament was informed that the King expected to have to increase the squadron in India, where France was collecting a force. The vote for 25,000 men was opposed by Admiral Saunders, who called it " a very great number in a time of newfound peace. As a seaman and officer I might be for it, or for any addition, but as a member of Parliament, and at a time when we have had the most pacific speech I ever heard from the throne, I think the demand very extraordinary." Keppel also opposed the vote, but it was carried. Donne, *George III and Lord North*, p. 83.

there ready to be brought into action on a proper occasion.”<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the news that the French regular troops were to be brought home this did not really modify the situation, for it was reported that they were merely to be replaced by 6,000 marines : so that by that means they would have “ a most formidable body of troops if the opportunity of employing them should occur.” It therefore still seemed in England as though, in spite of the change in the French Ministry, the danger was not yet by any means passed. Law, the Governor of Pondicherry, was known to be pressing for more troops there, and the evidence of intrigues of French agents with the Country Powers was too positive to be neglected. Harland was therefore told that if French troops were used as auxiliaries to either of the princes then hostile to the Company, or if corps of Europeans were formed at their courts, he was to declare in an express manner that no further supplies of men or arms would be allowed to enter Pondicherry : and he was authorised to use force if necessary to prevent their arrival.

No need for such drastic action arose. In the spring of 1772 real reductions in the French forces at Mauritius were being made. In January, as we have seen, orders were received there from France for the return of all the ships and troops which had been sent out a year earlier, leaving not more than 2,000 troops in the Island ; a sufficiency for a garrison only. The reduction in the squadron was even more important. Four 64's and four frigates and flûtes were reported as returning with the troops, two 22-gun flûtes had been lost in that disastrous hurricane which, blowing from February 29th to March 2nd, inflicted further crippling military injury by the destruction of the greater part of the crops of the Island. Thus the danger to India appeared to be removed. The French forces were evidently being withdrawn, and French policy was now believed to be pacific.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Rochford to Harland, informing him of the reason for sending the reinforcement of two ships April 7th, 1772. *Home Misc.* 109.



An opportunity to effect a reduction in the burden of expenditure appeared now to offer itself, and one measure of economy which this situation seemed to justify was a reduction of the East Indian squadron. Lord North therefore urged the First Lord, Lord Sandwich, to recall Harland's force.

"I do not recollect," he wrote, "to have seen a more pacific appearance of affairs than there is at this moment. France, neither from the disposition of her Prince or her Minister, or from her own situation, seems likely to engage in a war for some years. This is the time, if ever there was a time, for a reasonable and judicious economy. It is our duty to avail ourselves of it in order to get rid of some part of that debt which lies so heavy upon us. . . . Great peace establishments will, if we do not take care, prove our ruin : we shall fail at the long run by exhausting in times of tranquillity those resources upon which we are to depend in time of war."<sup>1</sup> It was not intended, he said, to stop work upon repairs, or to discontinue the necessary purchase of stores : but he thought the number of ships in commission might without risk be reduced, particularly the guardships and the East Indies squadron. "My wish therefore in the first place is to recall the fleet from India as soon as possible. Should the 1,500 marines not go from France, as was expected, or should a further embarkation of troops from the Mauritius take place, I still hope that we may see Sir Robert Harland's fleet at home about this time next year." Lord North proposed to reduce the guardships from twenty to sixteen. Unless this were done he could not afford the number of seamen needed for the foreign squadrons, as claimed by the Admiralty : but if it were done, 20,000 seamen would be voted in place of the 16,000 of the peace establishment and of the 25,000 asked for, which allowed for twenty guardships.

Lord Sandwich<sup>2</sup> disagreed. He did not think appearances

<sup>1</sup> Lord North to Lord Sandwich, September 5th, 1772. *Hinchinbrook Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Sandwich to Lord North, September 10th, 1772.

were so favourable to a continued peace as Lord North requested. Gustavus's *coup d'état* in Sweden, with the triumph of the French over the Russian party, might force us to support Russia and "most likely bring us into a war in the course of next year." He opposed the reduction of guardships, whose establishment, first planned by Lord Torrington, had been consistently maintained ever since. "Had we broke with Spain the other day<sup>1</sup> I am convinced that we should have lost the East Indies and possibly Gibraltar, and suffered by the capture of an immense number of our merchantmen before we could have had a fleet in readiness so as to venture to detach any considerable force from home. For when I came to the Board of Admiralty<sup>2</sup> we had not above fifteen ships fit for the sea and I believe the French and Spaniards were then superior to us." He wished therefore to retain the twenty guardships and the East Indies squadron, and, if more than 16,000 men could not be allowed, he would prefer to try and make the reduction elsewhere than there. In any case, he reminded Lord North, Harland could not be home for eighteen months, so that provision for the cost of his squadron must be made for longer than was proposed.

As is not unusual, a compromise resulted. The guardships were retained and Harland was ordered to send home two of his ships. But even this reduction was rescinded in November when advices were received which showed that the French regulars that were brought home were undoubtedly being replaced by marines, "therefore the King thinks it expedient not to diminish the present naval force."<sup>3</sup> But as reductions were certainly being made, and as several months must elapse before the marine reinforcements could replace the French troops which were withdrawn, the

<sup>1</sup> Viz., in the end in 1770, over the Falkland Islands dispute.

<sup>2</sup> In 1771; *vide ante*, p. 35, for the importance attached to the guardship organisation by King George III.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Rochford to Harland, November 16th, 1772. *Home Misc.* 109.

autumn and winter of 1772 passed in quiet, without any undue anxiety for India.

A cloud came over the situation, and the calm was ruffled for a short time, in the spring of 1773. It was brief, but it showed how very delicate were the relations between England and France, and how easily and with what suddenness hostilities might begin again, and out of what causes. War had broken out between Russia and the Porte, and as French trade in the Levant was suffering it appeared possible that France might join Sweden against Russia, or France and Spain might join to expel the Russians from the Mediterranean. The French Minister gave his assurance of the pacific intentions of his court; but at the same time as he was doing so, orders were being issued to the French Dockyards for fitting out a squadron of twelve ships of the line and six frigates. Although the reason given was that this was merely a "flotte d'évolutions," the situation in Europe was too tense, and the British Ministry had only too recently had acquaintance of Choiseul's plans for attacks in India, for this assurance to be accepted. "So considerable a force, at so great an expense, solely with a view of exercising their sailors, did not appear natural. The King, therefore, on receiving this intelligence . . . determined to order that 15 ships of the line with a proportionate number of frigates should be immediately fitted out for foreign service, and that an equivalent number of each be put into commission to replace them, and that the Marines be augmented."<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Saunders was appointed to the command, and the French Minister was informed that "if France thought proper to arm out a fleet, Great Britain would certainly do the same and follow them either in the Baltic or the Mediterranean." The result of this frank declaration, accompanied by this decisive step, was that the Toulon armament was suspended, and only three ships of the line and two frigates

<sup>1</sup> Rochford to Harland, April 28th, 1773. *Home Misc.* 109. Cf. Fortescue *Correspondence of King George III*, vol. i, p. 129 *et seq.*

were fitted out by the French.<sup>1</sup> The incident, however, left a feeling of uneasiness in the minds of British Ministers. Writing on April 28th and describing the state of affairs in the previous week, Lord Rochford informed Harland that until Ministers were sure that nothing further was intended, preparations would continue, and if war came "a very important scene of action would probably come on in the East Indies," whither a proper reinforcement would be sent: for as what were represented as reliefs to the troops in Mauritius were still being despatched, vigilance could not be relaxed.

The total suspension of French preparations at sea which very shortly followed, finally removed all suspicion, and orders were given not only to reduce to a peace establishment but also to recall Harland with the whole squadron from the East Indies; where he was to be relieved by Commodore Sir Edward Hughes, with a squadron reduced to one 50-gun ship, two frigates and a sloop.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Rochford's letter about the French armament did not reach Harland until January 1774; nor did his relief arrive until May of that year. He had received intelligence that the French were about to leave the Indies in June 1772, and of their disabled condition at the Islands; and confirmation of this news had reached him in September, when the Dolphin, which he sent to Mauritius for intelligence, brought back the news of their departure. This made his situation easier. It allowed him to take the squadron round to Bombay to dock and refit, of which it was now in great need. If service against the Mahrattas on the Malabar coast were still either necessary or practicable, he now felt free to use the squadron there, unhindered by the threat of a descent

<sup>1</sup> An evolutionary squadron had been introduced the year preceding, of three heavy ships, six frigates, three corvettes and three cutters, which had exercised in the Bay between May and September: Cf. Lacour Gayet, *La Marine sous Louis XV*, p. 431, and Appendix XVI.

<sup>2</sup> Salisbury, 50; Seahorse and Dolphin, 24; Swallow, 14. Rochford to Harland, November 6th, 1773. *Home Misc.* 112.

by the French on the Carnatic. But though, as he said in a letter to the Madras Council, everything pointed to peace and harmony between us and the French, "their late designs on this country teach us to be very much on our guard."

The first need in war is accurate intelligence and co-operation in procuring it. Anticipating the Napoleonic maxim, Harland wrote "it is best to be so well acquainted with circumstances as to leave nothing undetermined when any future event (however unlikely to happen at present) may make a prompt decision both necessary and expedient." With this in view he sent the Committee a series of questions relating to the military forces of France in India. What force had they in the Carnatic? What was the strength of the garrison of Pondicherry? Was their peace establishment complete, and if not, what was that establishment believed to be? Had the Council any intelligence of an intention to land troops or increase the Pondicherry garrison?—questions all of which clearly related to his instructions directing him to prevent the creation of a French field force. Further, he asked, what number of French troops might be landed on the coast, beyond those already there, without giving the Company anxiety for their possessions? How closely these matters affected the Commander of the squadron is obvious.

The Company gave him such information as they possessed. Pondicherry had a garrison of 800 Europeans and 400 sepoys; some 300 French deserters and stragglers were formed in a corps under Bazalet Jung; the establishment of Pondicherry was not known for certain but was believed to be no more than the above: there was no information of French schemes of reinforcing or landing troops, but if the French should exceed the establishment to above 2,000 Europeans it would indicate an intention beyond mere protection. The danger would not, however, be great even with that number unless joined by any Country Powers who could furnish cavalry, provisions and draft cattle, without which they

could not keep the field. They could, in fact, make raids only with that number so long as they were unassisted by Country Powers, but with the help those Powers could give, even 2,000 men would constitute a real menace; while every acquisition of territory made by the French, which increased their influence or support, must be considered prejudicial to the Company's interests. Putting the matter in terms with which we are familiar to-day, any force up to 2,000 would be a "raid," which would be dealt with by the forces on land. Above that would be an "invasion" against which the squadron must be the main defence.

Except for a small expedition sent in August 1773 to reduce the King of Tanjore, in which two of the smaller ships of the squadron took part, nothing of importance took place at sea during that year. Harland was mainly employed in a constant correspondence concerning policy, and in refusing foolish requests for using the ships for harassing the Mahrattas; a policy with which he was in profound disagreement. Indeed, the Company's policy appeared to have no clearly defined aim: for while refusing to come to any accommodation with the Confederacy, the Company lived in a constant state of fear of it. To Harland this policy, or lack of policy, appeared undesirable. If, he suggested, the Company feared an attack, they should at once take steps to discover whether there were any real grounds for that fear: and he proposed, with that in view, that he should himself write to the Mahrattas, in his capacity as an independent King's Officer, urging peace and friendship; and that he should let them know that any attack upon the Company's possessions would be resisted not only by the whole of their own forces but also by the Royal Squadron. He further informed the Company that if the Mahrattas actually invaded its territory, he was prepared to co-operate with the Company's forces in the capture of Salsette.

The Company, however, preferred a policy of procrastina-

tion and inert expectancy to one of bringing matters to a head—an unusual attitude, it must be said, on their part, for they were generally bold and ready to take the initiative. They replied that they had a respectable force (which actually amounted to 500 men) watching the Mahrattas ; but suggested once again that the squadron might with advantage attack them from the sea in Malabar. This, however, was far from Harland's duty. If war should arise, and the Company should be in danger, it was for him to defend its interests ; but it was no part of his duty to start a war, neither the need for nor inevitability of which was established. Prevention, he remarked, was better than cure. A warning of intention as to how we should act if attacked, and the discovery of what the Mahrattas had in view, were the first steps to take. As to the suggested attack on the Malabar coast, he asked caustically for details of the " many ports and valuable possessions " of the Mahrattas referred to by the Company ; but to this request he received no answer. Finally, in March 1774, the only definite demand made upon the squadron was that it should go to Bombay and assist to garrison the town during the rainy season while the Bombay Marine conducted some vaguely expressed operations against the Mahratta Navy. Harland flatly refused. He replied that he had the health of his ships' companies and also the European situation to consider. The proposal left the French wholly out of account, and it would be highly improper on his part to divide his squadron for such a purpose on such frivolous pretences, and expose his crews to the climate of Bombay at that season. He therefore remained in Trincomali, whither he had gone so soon as his refit was finished. The manner in which the Select Committees both of Bombay and Madras approached the question of the use of the squadron affords a clear illustration of the necessity for freedom from the control of such bodies. It had had its counterpart in the West Indies in an earlier war, where similar proposals for scattering the

squadron among the several Islands had been many times made by the local Assemblies.

While the year 1774 thus passed without any incidents of importance at sea, a serious development took place in the Mahratta situation ; which, by involving the Company in a war which drained and dissipated their forces at a time when concentration was essential for the security of the British Power in India, was profoundly to affect the later land and sea campaigns.

In November 1772 the Peshwa of the Mahratta confederacy, Mahadaroa, had died. His brother, who succeeded him, was murdered in the following August, and an uncle, Ragonath Rao, assumed the leadership. It was not unusual in such circumstances for a revolution to follow. Ragonath, very insecure in his hold, opened negotiations with the Bombay Government for their support. This Government, long anxious, as we have seen earlier, to extend their territory round Bombay in order to increase its power of self-support, of defence, and of revenue, offered to give Ragonath all the help in their power in return for the cession of Bassein and Salsette and those sundry islands which surround and form the harbour of Bombay. This Ragonath indignantly refused, and matters had come to a standstill when news was received in Bombay that a Portuguese expedition was on its way with the definite object of retaking those Islands together with other territories previously held by them. The Bombay Government now acted promptly. The return of any European Power was adverse to their interests. To forestall the Portuguese attempt, and to prevent any chance of Ragonath negotiating with them, they despatched a force of 620 European and 1,200 of their native troops to seize the Islands. The expedition left Bombay on December 12th, only a day before the arrival of the Portuguese. Escorted by the ships of the Bombay Marine the troops quickly captured the fortress of Tannah and the whole of Salsette at no great cost, though one valuable



life was lost, that of Commodore John Watson, a fine officer who commanded the Marine's flotilla.

Ragonath in the meantime found his own affairs going so badly that unless he could get help his cause would infallibly be lost. The terms he had rejected earlier he was now ready to accept. In March 1775, without reference to the Council at Calcutta, the Governor and Council of Bombay entered into a Treaty with Ragonath by the terms of which in exchange for military support for his cause he was to cede in perpetuity the Islands and other possessions which the Company desired.

Thus began the first Mahratta war. At a first glance it seems to have little connection with any squadrons at Brest or Mauritius. But its effect was to cripple the forces of the Company, to contribute to the successes of Hyder Ali in the Carnatic, and to make it possible later for the ships under Suffren to shake the very foundations of British power in India. For the present, however, it did not affect the course of affairs at sea. The Company put its coast-wise trade into convoys for defence against the Mahratta Navy which operated from its harbours and creeks, on the Malabar coast. The Mahrattas, however brilliant as soldiers, showed no capacity for sea fighting and did little injury. How ineffectual they were is well shown in an engagement which took place on January 26th, 1774, between two Company armed ships, each of twenty guns, against a Mahratta fleet of eight ships and two ketches, each vessel of which mounted more guns than the British. The Mahratta flagship was burnt and the squadron scattered without loss to the British, whose ships were hardly struck at all by the ill-directed Mahratta fire.<sup>1</sup>

These operations against the Mahrattas at sea were wholly

<sup>1</sup> British Force: Revenge, frigate, 20 guns; Bombay, grab, 20 guns.

Mahratta Force: Shumshere Jung, 40; Fallee Jung, 38; Dat Paul, Narror Paul and Naddow Paul, 26; Ramspursand, Greypursand and Shoespursand, ketches, 26; and two other ketches from Tarnagiri. I take the spelling from the Bombay Government's Report.

conducted by the Bombay Marine. The Royal Squadron remained on the Coromandel coast, with Madras as its headquarters, until May 16th, 1774, when Commodore Sir Edward Hughes sailed into the Road, bringing with him the Salisbury 50 and Seahorse 24 to relieve Sir Robert Harland, the whole of whose heavy ships <sup>1</sup> were now ordered to return to England.

<sup>1</sup> Northumberland, 70; Oxford, 70; Buckingham, 70; Prudent, 64; Intrepid, 64; Warwick, 50; and the Hawke, 10.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WAR IN THE EAST, 1775-1781

COMMODORE HUGHES's instructions, dated November 4th, 1773, issued and signed by the King, were of the same tenor as those of his predecessors, except that the plenipotentiary powers there conferred, no longer being necessary, were not included. He was informed that "in consideration of the present situation of affairs and the appearance of the continuance of peace" it had been thought fit to reduce the naval force in the East Indies. As usual, he was directed to repair to Fort St. George on the Coromandel coast, the headquarters of the East Indies Squadron. He was ordered to afford the Governor-General and Council of Bengal and its dependencies "all the assistance in your power for carrying into execution such measures and plans of operations which shall be settled and agreed upon by the said Governor-General and Council, and as may be most conducive to those ends, so far as they may be consistent with our engagements expressed in the 11th Article of the Treaty of Paris . . . at the same time cautiously avoiding whatever might be construed an act of hostility against the settlements, possessions or subjects of any European Prince or Potentate. And you shall assist at all councils of war wherein any service, in which our naval force is to co-operate, shall be taken into consideration."

As before, an explanatory letter from the Secretary of State, setting out in greater detail the situation, accompanied the formal instructions.

"By the best intelligence we have been able to procure it appears that the naval and land forces of the French in India have been of late considerably diminished. The

professions of that Court are also at present friendly and peaceable, and they disclaim all intentions of disturbing the tranquillity of India. However, as their situation so very distant from hence gives them an opportunity sooner or later of renewing their schemes, which I can only believe to be laid aside for a more suitable occasion, it will not be less proper that you give the most diligent attention for procuring all such intelligence as may throw light upon what the French may have in view in that part of the world ; and you will keep a constant watchful eye over their motions and inform yourself by all possible means of the state of their forces in India, and particularly at Mauritius, where their principal strength is. Should you be obliged to put in at the Cape you may have an opportunity of collecting some useful notices about the French ships which have touched there, in going out and returning to France, and particularly with regard to a 64-gun ship and two or three frigates with some cutters which arrived from France and False Bay about June 2nd last, commanded by M. de Kerguelin. It seems their design is to settle some new colony, but the reports about the precise place of their destination are hitherto so vague and contradictory that we must wait to receive more exact information thereon.”<sup>1</sup>

Choiseul's plans had indeed thrown an atmosphere of justifiable suspicion over every movement made by the French, and circumstances in the Indies did nothing to allay those suspicions. Proposals for an attack upon Bengal made by the Governor of Chandernagore had fallen into the hands of the British : military stores were being supplied by the French to Bazalet Jung through a port on the Coromandel coast ; and the attachment of Hyder to the French, and of them to him, confirmed the probability that the outbreak of an Anglo-French war would be quickly followed by an alliance against the English.<sup>2</sup> Although, therefore, the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Roehford to Commodore Hughes, November 6th, 1773.

<sup>2</sup> Various reports dated between March 1774 and March 1775. *Ad. Sec.* 746.

French naval and military forces had been so drastically reduced watchfulness could not be relaxed : and Hughes, writing to the President of Fort St. George in March 1775, urged him to spare no pains or expense in obtaining intelligence of any negotiations of the French with the Indian Powers, and of their troops at Pondicherry, Masulipatam and elsewhere. In order to be in readiness himself for anything that might occur, he dropped down to Madras from Calcutta, where he had wintered, as early as the conditions on the coast admitted—the end of January—choosing that spot as the most central on his station.

The outbreak of trouble with the Northern Colonies in America caused no change in the East Indies, though naturally the fitting out of ships at Brest was looked upon as the preliminary to a French attack. Nevertheless, the two years of Hughes's command were undisturbed by anything except rumour. The ill-judged war of the Company with the Mahrattas was brought to a conclusion in March 1776 by orders from the Governor-General, who disapproved the whole of the proceedings of the Bombay Council ; but the peace was unsatisfactory and disappointing. All the territory which had been won was lost, the problem of the Mahratta succession was not finally settled, and the enmity which had been created with the two principal powers in India was as acute as ever.

The first effect at sea of the War of American Independence on Indian affairs was to introduce the need for protection of East Indiamen on their homeward voyage. On this voyage, as we have seen, these vessels refreshed at St. Helena, which was therefore a focal point in their route. Early in 1776 the report was received that an American squadron of three frigates <sup>1</sup> and two 16-gun brigantines were preparing to sail to cruise for the East Indiamen in this area. Two 32-gun frigates were therefore ordered to that station to meet the home-coming trade and escort it to England, and

<sup>1</sup> A 34 and a 30 from Philadelphia, and a 20 from Rhode Island.

the West Coast of Africa Squadron<sup>1</sup> was ordered on the same service ; but no disturbance was caused in the Indian Ocean. As the recent assembly of ships and troops had brought home to the Admiralty how serious a threat Mauritius constituted, Captain James Cook, who was about to proceed upon a voyage of discovery, was ordered, in the course of his navigation to the South Seas, to search for some islands reported to be in the latitude of 48° S. and about the meridian of Mauritius. An island in that situation, with a good harbour, although it should afford little or nothing more than shelter, wood and water, " may hereafter prove very useful " as a base of operations against Mauritius.

As the year 1776 progressed, and it was known that France was furnishing assistance to the Americans directly from the Royal arsenals as well as privately, besides allowing the use of her ports to privateers, the probability increased that she would eventually intervene more actively. In the end of June a greater activity was reported from Brest than at any previous time since the peace, and on October 1st it was definitely stated that six ships of the line and four frigates were arming with all haste, while another squadron of seven or eight of the line was reported to be preparing for the East Indies. At the same time, as Hughes had now held the command for its full period of about three years, Commodore Sir Edward Vernon—a nephew of the Admiral of that name—was appointed to relieve him. A slight increase was made in the strength of the squadron by the substitution of the *Rippon*, a 60-gun ship, for Hughes's 50-gun flagship. " There is reason to believe," wrote Lord Weymouth, " that the naval and land forces of the French in India have been of late in some measure increased. It becomes therefore essentially necessary that you give the most diligent attention to procure such intelligence as may throw light on their views in that part of the world. You will keep a constant watchful eye on their motions and

<sup>1</sup> *Pallas*, 36 ; *Atalante*, 14 ; *Weazel*, 14.

inform yourself by all possible means of the state of their forces in Asia, and particularly at the islands of Mauritius and Bourbon."<sup>1</sup>

Leaving England in October 1776, Vernon reached India in the middle of 1777. Mahratta troubles were once again beginning. A French envoy, of the name of St. Lubin, had arrived in the spring with instructions to induce the Poona Durbar to cede the Port of Choul, some thirty miles to the southward of Bombay, to France, in return for which French officers would train a sepoy army, and 2,500 French troops, with their own munitions, would assist the Mahrattas against the English. The Bombay Government was disturbed by this new threat, for the prospect of the arrival of French troops was not one to be treated lightly. Vernon, therefore, took his squadron round to Bombay, but as no further developments took place during the monsoon months, he returned as usual to the Coromandel coast in the spring of 1778.

In February 1778, the French Government definitely recognised the independence of America. The Admiralty then prepared to reinforce the East Indies squadron. The *Asia*, a 64-gun ship, was appointed to take out a convoy in April and to remain on the station, while several other ships of the line were ordered to be prepared for service there,<sup>2</sup> under the command of Vice-Admiral John Byron. But before these ships sailed they were required for more pressing services in North America, and the *Asia*, which reached Vernon on March 2nd, 1779, was the only reinforcement he then received.

News that war with France was imminent reached Bombay in June. The Mahratta question was still unsettled and negotiations were in progress. The Mahratta Government denied that any agreement had been made with the French,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Weymouth to Vernon ; explanatory letter accompanying his instructions, October 26th, 1776. *Home Misc.* 165.

<sup>2</sup> Secret Instructions, April 11th, 1778. *Ad. Sec.* 1333.

but the Council of Bombay, considering their replies evasive, were taking steps to install at Poona a regent favourable to the English. Fully expecting that a French descent upon their coast would immediately take place, they wrote to Vernon requesting him to come to Bombay at once to guard them against a French attack. As so frequently happens, they considered their territory the certain objective of the enemy. The settlements on the Coromandel coast, they wrote, were "in so respectable a situation" that they could be in no danger, and the squadron could render no services there so essential as those in defence of Bombay. Vernon received this letter on July 8th at Madras. At this moment, a French squadron, under M. de Tronjoly, apparently slightly superior to his own, was lying at Pondicherry. This was the only French naval force on the coast of India at the time though other ships were known to be at the Mauritius.

The Commodore communicated the request to the Council of Fort St. George, asking them whether they had any objection to make to the proposal from Bombay. The Council, while agreeing that Bombay was a probable objective of the French in case of war, reasoned that such an attack would only be made with a considerable army, and that such an army would need a strong naval defence. They left it to Vernon to say whether he could do anything against such a force as the enemy must be expected to send. They pointed out, on the other hand, that a French squadron was at this moment actually on the Coromandel coast, the destruction of which would be of material assistance in any operation against Pondicherry, besides being essential for the protection of the shipping in the Bay of Bengal. In fact, and with sound commonsense, they weighed the certainty of a French squadron within striking distance against a problematical invasion at a point separated by a six weeks' voyage; and took the only possible view. Vernon fully agreed, and, in declining to come to Bombay, he added



that Madras was the rendezvous to which it had been arranged that any information or reinforcements from England should be sent, being "the most central point to act from."

A fortnight after the arrival of the Bombay Council's request the sloop *Cormorant* sailed into Madras Roads. She brought letters, dated April 8th, 1778, from Lord Weymouth, sent overland by Suez, announcing the declaration of war.<sup>1</sup> The Commodore was informed of the general state of Europe, of the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship concluded between France and the United States, of the consequent recall of the British Ambassador, and of the active preparations for war now being made at all the French seaports. While he was enjoined to be extremely vigilant for signs of attack, his attitude was by no means to be purely defensive. "In case the military and naval force in India should be so far superior to that of France as to give reasonable expectation of success in any important measure, it is His Majesty's pleasure that it should be attempted, and proper authority has been given for that purpose to the Company." Vernon was to give all the assistance in his power. Weymouth's letter to the Madras Council conveyed the authority of the Home Government to attack Pondicherry.

The Council met at once to decide upon action, for which it was fully prepared. It will be recollected that, when war was expected in 1770, the Ministry had authorised the Company to attack the French settlements immediately war should be declared. Upon the assumption that this should be the policy in any war, the Company, when the threat of the war had become serious, had assembled 10,000 troops at Conjevaram, a central position well suited either for the defence of Madras or attack upon Pondicherry, being forty

<sup>1</sup> The overland route for communications had only recently been developed by the energy of a private merchant, George Baldwin, who, acting as Agent for the E.I. Company, began developing a regular despatch system through Egypt in 1775. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, p. 10 *et seq.*

miles from the one and sixty from the other. The Council now proposed to attack Pondicherry at once, to strike at this base, "the root of the French power in India," and thereby to obtain hold of the only place on the coast, together with its resources, at which a landing could be made from the sea. Vernon was asked to attend the Council next day, the 23rd, and the situation, as seen by them, was explained to him. He wholly agreed with the proposal. It was therefore decided to attack Pondicherry with the least possible delay, the troops moving by land and the squadron sailing to block up the port and prevent the arrival of succour. As the French squadron was superior to the British, Vernon asked for a reinforcement of two armed ships, and this the Council readily granted, giving orders for the arming of the Indiamen Valentine and Glatton with 24 guns. The preparation of this reinforcement necessarily caused some delay, and diminished the chances of surprising the enemy, but since it was not unreasonable to expect that news of the declaration of war had also been sent by the French court, certain strength was properly considered of greater importance than possible surprise: and Vernon sailed on July 29th. On the very day after the squadron had left Madras—it was, in fact, still in sight, for the wind was very faint—news arrived from Bengal that the Bengal Government had seized Chandernagore, and there could be no doubt but that the information would also have reached Pondicherry and that surprise would not have been effected.

Vernon appears to have assumed that with his force now strengthened by these two ships, the French Commander would not fight. He expected that so soon as Tronjoly should have heard war declared he would draw his squadron under the protection of the guns of the fort, where it would be secure from attack. "My chief attention, therefore," he wrote, "must be to prevent any reinforcement being thrown in, which it is said they expect, as they lately despatched the Subtile, a frigate of 24 guns, to Mauritius."

The passage towards Pondicherry in the light and uncertain breezes of July was very slow ; and slow as it was it was rendered slower by the bad sailing of the *Glatton*. Fearing that the delay would allow supplies to be brought into the town, Vernon dropped the ship, sending her back to Madras ; she would in any case only have been a hindrance to his movements in an action. Even when rid of her it was not until the evening of August 8th that Pondicherry and the French ships came in sight, nor till the morning of the 10th that he was able to distinguish them as a squadron of five men-of-war.

The force which M. de Tronjoly had with him was not the whole French naval strength in the Eastern seas. The *Subtile*, 24, had been detached, as Vernon had known, to the Mauritius. At Mauritius there were also the *Elizabeth*, originally a 20- or 22-gun ship but rearmed with 36 guns, and a sloop.<sup>1</sup> He was thus short of at least two good fighting ships, which, in the closely balanced gun-power of the two squadrons, would have been a respectable addition to his force.<sup>2</sup> For what reason the Chef d'escadre had not concentrated his whole force during that critical time cannot be said. It may be that the ships at the islands were not ready, or that he was unaware of the intention of his Government ; though it is also possible that, since his orders from his Minister were that the principal object of his squadron was the

<sup>1</sup> Cunat (*Histoire de Suffren*, p. 72) includes the *Flamand*, 50, as one of the squadron already in the East, but she had not arrived in time to join Tronjoly at Pondicherry. She sailed from France early in 1778 (Castex, *Manœuvre de la Praya*, p. 18).

<sup>2</sup> British Squadron.		French Squadron.	
Rippon . . .	60	Brillant . . .	64
Coventry . . .	28	Pourvoyeuse . . .	36
Seahorse . . .	24	Sartine . . .	26
Valentine (E.I.C. ship) .	24	Lauriston (armed trans-	
Cormorant (sloop) .	14	port) . . .	22
		Brisson (armed vessel) .	24
	<hr/> 150 guns.		<hr/> 172 guns.

defence of the islands,<sup>1</sup> and that he subsequently acted as though the best defence was to keep the squadron in the harbour of Port Louis, he left some ships behind him with that object. Belief in the employment of ships in local defence is an aberration which even to-day people find it difficult to unlearn.

Vernon need not have been anxious that Tronjoly would avoid action, for on sighting him the French commander promptly put to sea with the land breeze and bore down on him. The wind shortly after midday shifted to a sea breeze, which gave the British the weather gage, and Vernon made the signal to lead down. "Having so little wind and the uncertainty of a continuance," he wrote, "I thought it necessary to bring them to action" without manœuvring. A general action began an hour later, which at times was extremely close. After two hours' fighting the French made sail on a wind to the southward,<sup>2</sup> and Vernon, whose masts and rigging were much cut about, hauled to the North-East and kept the wind to secure the weather gage on the morrow's sea breeze; but at daylight next morning there was no sign of the enemy. The strong northerly current had carried the British, whose damages aloft prevented them from holding their own against it, away from Pondicherry, and it took no less than ten days, with such light winds as then prevailed, to return to the offing of the port. The French squadron was then sighted under sail in Pondicherry Roads, standing towards the North-East, but the breeze was so light that Vernon was unable to get in touch with it on the 21st. Next morning, when day broke, the enemy was sighted at a great distance to the southward. Vernon made sail in chase but soon found that he could not overhaul them, and considering that the most important business now was to bring about the fall of Pondicherry, he returned to the road and anchored as close in as he could in order to cut off all

<sup>1</sup> Chevalier, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> The French despatch reverses this account. "*Les Anglais ont abandonné le champ de bataille.*"

supplies by sea and give what help he could to the army. The first fruit of his return was the capture of a ship from Mauritius bringing the Chief and Second Engineer of Pondicherry back from the islands; the second was the capture of the *Sartine*. This small vessel, having been separated from her squadron, was returning to the base in hopes of finding it: directly she came near the *Coventry* and *Seahorse* put to sea and, after a long chase, took her.

Even before the loss of the *Sartine*, Tronjoly had decided to leave Pondicherry and not to try further conclusions with Vernon. His losses in the action had greatly exceeded those of the British squadron,<sup>1</sup> though his ships were little injured aloft. Damage aloft could be repaired provided there were stores with which to effect repairs. Losses of seamen were less easy to replace. To the Council of Pondicherry he represented that he was also short of victuals and ammunition, and that while the British would certainly be reinforced, he could expect no increase in his squadron; to remain could thus only result in his being blocked up in Pondicherry and so forced to surrender when the place was taken.<sup>2</sup> He therefore sailed for the islands, leaving Pondicherry to a fate from which, he felt, no effort of his could save it.

While the squadron was thus engaged, Munro's army was approaching the town. His batteries were in position on September 8th and his bombardment began on that day. By the 16th a practicable breach had been made and an assault was delivered but repulsed. Garrisoned by a force of some 3,000 troops, of whom 900 were Europeans, Pondicherry offered a most gallant resistance and did not surrender until October 18th after causing heavy losses to the besiegers.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> French, 71 killed; 98 wounded (Cunat, p. 70). British, 11 killed; 50 wounded (Vernon's official despatch).

<sup>2</sup> Cunat, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Total British force 10,500, of whom 1,500 were Europeans: British losses, 224 killed, 693 wounded.

Total French force 3,000, of whom 900 were Europeans: French losses, 200 killed, 480 wounded (Munro's Despatch. *Home Misc.* 142).

Throughout this time a rigorous and complete blockade was maintained at sea by Vernon's squadron, now reinforced by three more Indiamen from the Madras Presidency and two from Bengal, the latter particularly well armed with 40 guns each. Several vessels were taken attempting to bring in provisions, but few, if any, succeeded.

After the fall of Pondicherry, Vernon returned the Madras ships to the Company in order to make their commercial voyages. He retained the two 40-gun Bengal ships for service in the combined expedition it was intended to undertake immediately against Mahé, the main French settlement on the Malabar coast. Karikal and Yanam, lesser places, were taken without difficulty by the Company troops without help from the sea.

The two months spent at sea, without opportunity for obtaining much fresh provisions or water, had caused an outbreak of that sickness in the British squadron which was so pre-eminent a factor in campaigns at sea until the remedy for scorbutic affections was discovered. Vernon therefore dropped down to Trincomali to recuperate while the army was making ready for the operation against Mahé. By December the squadron was reported as fit for the sea. The troops, however, were not ready until January, partly due to the fact that owing to shortage of shipping—or rather to a preference for sending the shipping available upon its customary trading voyages—the troops had to march across Southern India to Anjengo, a distance of over 300 miles, which entailed the collection of land transport. In the meantime Hyder had been informed of the intended attack. Then arose an inconvenient situation. An army from Bombay, under the command of Colonel Goddard, had been sent with confidence to occupy Poona. It met with a disastrous repulse, and the news of Goddard's surrender and of the humiliating Convention of Worgaon reached Madras at this very moment. It became a question as to whether it would now be prudent to attack Mahé. After grave

discussion it was decided that boldness was the best policy, for any sign of timidity at this juncture would be prejudicial, and any withdrawal of the troops to reinforce the forces in the north would be followed by a French attack upon the valuable station of Tellicherry. It was therefore decided to proceed.

This decision had hardly been made when a further complication occurred. A letter was received from Hyder declaring that Mahé, with all the settlements on the Malabar coast, was under his protection, and if any attack on it were made he would oppose it, and even invade the Carnatic; and at the same time news came from the Nabob of Arcot that Hyder's troops were already actually on his borders. This was very disturbing. Nothing was more necessary than to avoid a quarrel with Hyder, not only because if he chose to oppose the expedition he could certainly oppose it with superior numbers, but still more on account of his threat to invade. His army was large. He was at peace with the Mahrattas. He had reason to be incensed at the Company's failure to observe the Treaty of 1769 and assist him. There were thus ample reasons for supposing that Hyder's threat would be put into execution and his presence with armed forces on the frontiers furnished evidence of his intentions. Nevertheless, the situation had reached a point at which it was nearly impossible for the Committee at Madras to draw back, for the troops had now reached Anjengo, and a portion was known already to have embarked for Tellicherry. There was no alternative but to proceed with the attack, even though it might embroil the Company with the ruler of Mysore.

Vernon's squadron, reinforced by the *Asia* and accompanied by some transports to carry the troops to Tellicherry, had arrived at Anjengo on February 1st, 1779. Colonel Brathwaite, who was to command on shore, had not then arrived, and, as it was clearly desirable to prevent the arrival of any reinforcement from the islands, Vernon sailed at once in the

Rippon to block up the port, leaving the rest of the squadron<sup>1</sup> to protect the transports against any attack by Hyder's fleet from Mangalore. He seems to have taken it for granted that no interference was to be expected from the French squadron at Mauritius, where—though he was unaware of it—reinforcements had joined M. Tronjoly, whose squadron,<sup>2</sup> strengthened by the addition of a 50- and a 40-gun ship, was only slightly inferior to the British. Whether the French Commander was aware of the reinforcement that had reached Vernon, or whether he felt that his instructions to regard the defence of Port Louis as the primary object of his care, obliged him to remain in that harbour, cannot be said. There, however, he remained, contenting himself with sending out two ships during April 1779 to cruise upon British trade off the Agulhas Bank, and with the remainder awaiting reinforcements from France in the harbour of Port Louis. The meagre result of this cruise was the capture of one ship, and no reinforcement arrived until the latter months of the year when the old 74-gun ship *l'Orient*, under the command of M. d'Orves, sailed into Port Louis. Attacked by land and blockaded by sea, Mahé fell an easy capture to the British forces.

While in India the French settlements were thus falling into the hands of the Company, the Directors in London were pressing the Government for further protection. The disclosures of the plans of 1770 convinced them that now that war had come an attack would be made on India; and early in December this belief was translated into what appeared to be certainty by a well-authenticated report that a squadron, variously reported to consist of either six or eight of the line, under M. de Ternay, was fitting out for the East

<sup>1</sup> The ships present were: King's ships: *Rippon*, 60; *Asia*, 64; *Coventry*, 28; *Seahorse*, 24. Bombay Marine: *Revenge*, 20, and Bombay, grab, 20. Bengal ships: *Royal Charlotte*, 40; *Resolution*, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Brillant*, 64; *Flamand*, 50; *Consolante*, 40; *Pourvoyeuse*, 36; *Elizabeth*, 36; *Subtile*, 24; *Sylphide*, 14.



Indies.<sup>1</sup> The Secretary of State at once decided to reinforce the British squadron. Orders were given for seven of the line to be prepared without delay, and Sir Edward Hughes, now a Rear-Admiral, was reappointed, at the special request of the East India Company, to the command from which he had so lately returned. The full advantage of his experience would thus be obtained.

Sir Edward Hughes was now about fifty-nine years old.<sup>2</sup> Entering the Navy at the age of fourteen he had served in the two previous wars. He was with Vernon at Porto Bello and Cartagena: as a lieutenant in the *Dunkirk* he took part in Mathews's indecisive action off Toulon in 1744, when he witnessed the shameful behaviour of Lestock's division, of which the *Dunkirk* was the van ship. In 1747, in the *Warwick*, 60, he had known what it was to be beaten off by a 74, the *Glorioso*. In the next war he was with Boscawen in the capture of Louisbourg and with Saunders at Quebec: but he missed Hawke's great battle of Quiberon Bay. His previous appointment to the East Indian Command in 1773 appears to have been due to the influence of Sir Hugh Palliser, the Yorkshireman who advanced the fortunes of Captain Cook, who, knowing that Hughes desired the command, recommended him to Lord Sandwich. "I think your Lordship cannot bestow the favour upon one who is either more deserving or who will take more pains to acquit himself to your Lordship's satisfaction. One thing which I think an essential quality your Lordship will be sure to find in him, that is, that he will not wander out of the path that may be prescribed to him to follow any schemes (*sic*) or whims of his own, nor never will study to find fault with his orders, but always how he may best exe-

<sup>1</sup> Actually, de Ternay's squadron was to consist of five ships. It was sent to the West Indies in consequence of the affair at St. Lucia.

<sup>2</sup> The date of his birth is uncertain: it is believed to have been in 1720.—D. N. B.

cute them for His Majesty's service."<sup>1</sup> Thus, besides being an officer with a considerable experience of combined operations, he was looked on as a "safe" man: one who could be trusted to carry out his orders, for whom orders were sufficient, and who would indulge in none of those inconvenient departures from precedent or liberal interpretations of instructions—"schemes or whims"—that are so distressing to certain types of the official mind. The Fighting Instructions would furnish him with all the tactical doctrine that was needed in fighting a battle, and a well-drilled squadron capable of maintaining a close line of battle was a fit and adequate instrument for putting those Instructions into practice. The logs of his ships show that the ship that was not in her proper place had not long to wait before the signal to take up her station was rapped in to her captain.

It is axiomatic in war that superiority over the enemy in as many as its forms—moral, personal or material—should be created at the spot at which the decisive blow is to be struck or the principal impression is to be made. For the creation of this superiority a combination of many means and measures is open to the tactician; surprise, rapidity of movement, containing action in any of its many forms, and distribution of metal. Hughes, as all his movements show, had great skill in handling a body of ships, a good eye, a true seaman's power of judgment. His employment of this skill, and of the corresponding technical skill of his captains and men, was confined to moving the squadron in such a manner as to bring his single line into action with the enemy's, ship for ship, van to van; and very ably this was done. But it was not extended to manœuvre as a means of creating superiority out of inferiority, as Ruyter earlier at Solebay, and later Suffren and Nelson at Sadras, the Nile and Trafalgar, employed it. Of all the available means he employs one only—that of massing heavy metal in the centre of his line; a measure whose aim, employed as he

<sup>1</sup> Palliser to Sandwich, August 11th, 1773. *Hinchinbrook Papers*.

employed it and without tactical manœuvre, is more directly related to defence than to offence ; to security than defeat of the enemy.

His tactical resources being confined to measures of a material and technical order produced their result upon his strategy. Under such a limitation, well aware that nothing could save India for the British if the squadron were lost or disabled for long, and opposed throughout the first year by a squadron of superior material strength commanded by a man for whose ability he had a great regard, no surprise may be felt in finding that he attached a particular importance to assuring that the material needs of his ships should be met to the utmost : for having no tactical means of compensating for his numerical inferiority he must find his security for extracting himself from an awkward situation, in his ships being well found, even at the risk of delay and loss of that which in war never can be recovered—Time.

His skill in handling a fleet is apparent : and if that lively writer, William Hickey, records his own conversations accurately, this was fully recognised by Suffren whom he represents as saying that in every one of his hard-contested battles Hughes showed that “he possessed consummate skill and abilities, equal to any man’s I have ever had to deal with in my profession,” and that his manners and conduct had been uniformly those of a “brave and gallant officer.” Of his bravery indeed there is no possible question. The losses by the *Superb* attest it not only by their numbers, but in their being the highest in the aggregate of all the vessels of the squadron.

In person he is shown us by Reynolds as a very corpulent man with a certain look of disdain in his eyes and mouth. The scurrilous rascal Hicky<sup>1</sup> of the *Bengal Gazette* furnishes a description which probably possesses that gross resemblance which is the essence of a caricature. “He is a short thick-set, fat man : his skin fits remarkably tight about him ; has

<sup>1</sup> Not to be confounded with William Hickey of the *Memoirs*.

very rosy gills, and drivels a little at the mouth from the constant use of quids." Yet for all his heavy build he appears not to have suffered from the climate of India. After his first three years he was able to say "The climate agrees perfectly with me," and his friend Palk remarks on his good health on his return to India in 1780: nor does he at any later date complain of want of health up to the time of his departure in 1784.

The King's Instructions to Hughes, dated December 28th, 1778, informed him that the situation in India now called for the support of the Crown. His relations with the Governors and Councils were to be the same as those of his predecessors; that is to say, he was to be a member of all Councils in which operations involving the use of the squadron should be discussed, and to co-operate in the operations decided upon; with the provision, designed to safeguard the squadron against misuse, "consulting nevertheless what may be practicable and fit for our ships and most advisable for the general service"—a very necessary provision. The usual covering letter from the Secretary of State informed him that "the attempts the French have lately made to gain an establishment on the coast of Bombay is an object of very material importance, and requires also your particular attention."

The squadron<sup>1</sup> was to escort a convoy of thirteen East Indiamen, carrying a military reinforcement of a battalion of Lord Macleod's Regiment.<sup>2</sup> It was not until March 1779 that it was ready, and in the interval a situation had arisen on the West Coast of Africa which called for its employment on its way out. On January 30th, a small force<sup>3</sup> under M. de Vaudreuil had sailed from Brest without opposition, and raided the West African settlements from

<sup>1</sup> *Superb* (flag), 74; *Exeter*, *Eagle*, *Burford*, *Worcester*, *Belleisle*, 64's; and the sloop *Nymph*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Now the 71st Highland Light Infantry.

<sup>3</sup> *Fendant*, 74; *Sphinx*, 64; *Résolue*, *Nymphé*, *Lunette*, *Épervier* and *Lively*.

Senegal to Sierra Leone; for the West African squadron had first been called away to protect the home-coming East Indiamen,<sup>1</sup> and later had been transferred for service on the coast of North America. Hughes was ordered to recapture Goree. A small force which was simultaneously on its way to North America<sup>2</sup> was attached to his squadron for this purpose, carrying a part of the 75th regiment for a garrison of the place when retaken.

Hughes sailed on March 7th. Three weeks later certain news was received that de Ternay's squadron had been countermanded and that there was no present intention to send any ships to the East.<sup>3</sup> The Admiralty thereupon (not the Secretary of State, by whose order he had been sent), in the hopes of catching him at Goree, at once despatched the sloop *Delight* with a letter ordering him to send home three ships. The operations there had, however, been carried out with such ease and speed that by the time the sloop arrived Hughes had sailed, and the letter was transmitted, on her return to England, overland to Bombay.

Thus the entire squadron reached Madras in January 1780. There they found conditions very quiet. During the nine months that had passed since the capture of Mahé, Vernon had had but few demands upon his service, other than the defence of trade. Hyder, though his hostility was evident, had as yet done nothing, and the only military operations in progress were those against the Mahrattas, and therefore, although the season was against the use of ships on this lee shore during the months of the south-west monsoon, Vernon remained at Bombay and Surat to give any help the Bengal reinforcements might require, taking the welcome opportunity to refit his ships. The only services which had called for the use of his small squadron were those necessary to

<sup>1</sup> Note, see ante, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Vengeance*, 74; *Actaeon*, 44; *Hyaena*, 24; *Vesuvius* and *Etna*, bomb ketches.

<sup>3</sup> Admiralty to Hughes, March 28th, 1779. *Secret Instructions* 1336.

deal with some French privateers which had appeared in the Malacca Straits, a favourite spot, naturally, for them to work. The China convoys were consequently escorted by the frigate Seahorse and the Company's 40-gun armed ship Resolution, her crew strengthened with the men from the ships of the line.<sup>1</sup>

Thus when Hughes arrived, he found, to all appearances, British interests secure: so secure, indeed, from serious outward attack, that when he received the Admiralty order, already referred to, which had missed him at Goree, to send home three of his capital ships,<sup>2</sup> he despatched them without more delay than was needed to prepare them for the voyage, taking with them a convoy of Indiamen. In this event there appears to have been a lack either of co-operation or foresight, or of both, between the Admiralty and the Secretary of State, for barely three months later, the Secretary sent orders directing the Admiralty's order of recall to be suspended "if any important blow can be struck with the naval force in the East Indies against the enemies, or if the defence of the Company's interests required their retention": both of these being matters which could easily have been considered three months earlier, and much needless sailing saved at a time when every ship was wanted. When the letter reached Hughes on May 30th the ships were already seven weeks on their way home, and it was doubtful, though just possible, that they could be caught at the Cape. Hughes thereon asked the Select Committee whether any material blow was practicable against either French or Spaniards which would make it worth while trying to recall the ships. They replied that neither men nor money were available. Their finances were at a very low ebb indeed, a great part of their forces had been sent

<sup>1</sup> The crews, even of the Bombay Marine, were largely made up of Indian ratings. A stiffening of British seamen was desirable if European ships were to be fought. *Vide* Appendix I, on the Bombay Marine.

<sup>2</sup> Belleisle, Asia and Rippon. Ordered to sail April 6th, 1780.

to Gujerat—most unwisely—and such troops as remained in the Presidency were needed for the defence of their own territories and those of their ally, the Nabob of Arcot.

The only enemy places of importance at which the enemy could be injured were Mauritius and Manilla, and except in so far as the latter was a base from which Spanish privateers could attack the China trade it was of no importance strategically. Mauritius was too strongly garrisoned to be attempted. As to the security of the Company's possessions in India, Hughes, with the five good ships remaining, felt himself confident of being able to deal with any attempt made from the sea, as the French, according to his information, had but four of the line and three or four frigates at Mauritius, and those in bad repair or ill-manned. If they should be added to, he put his trust in Lord Hillsborough to reinforce him in time.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he did not miss the opportunity to repeat what his predecessor had said, and what he was again to repeat very many times, that the Mahratta War was an extremely ill-judged concern which could draw after it "consequences extremely prejudicial to the Company's affairs"; an opinion concurred in later both by Warren Hastings and Eyre Coote and fully warranted by events.

He had not long to wait either for the justification by events, or for his confidence in his ability to hold his own at sea to be shaken. Hyder Ali, though he had taken no immediate action as the result of his flouting by the Company at Mahé, had refused to be conciliated. While the Mahratta War was absorbing the services of the armies of the three Presidencies, Hyder, biding his time, was preparing to carry out his threat of invading the Carnatic. In June he was ready; then, with an army of 90,000 men, he marched out of Bangalore<sup>2</sup> and a month later his cavalry was plundering Porto Novo. With affairs in this situation

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Lord Hillsborough, June 4th, 1780.

<sup>2</sup> Fortescue, vol. iii, p. 432.

intelligence reached Hughes that the French squadron had been reinforced by one 64-gun ship, the *Sévère*, and though this still apparently left the French inferior,<sup>1</sup> no other certain information had been received from Mauritius since February ; and there had been too many reports of activity in the islands and the Cape to allow of dismissing the possibility that troops might be brought to India. Moreover, he had good reason to believe that Hyder expected help from Mauritius.<sup>2</sup>

With the prospect of the appearance of a French squadron to co-operate with Hyder, the Admiral decided to take up a covering position off Negapatam. There he would be well placed to intercept any enemy who might come, provided the squadron was adequately furnished with frigates. Lying to windward of all the British possessions on the Coromandel coast, as well as of those of the native princes who might be expected to offer the use of their harbours to any enemy, Negapatam could supply a squadron with the essential needs of a secure anchorage, water and provisions ; for the country in rear could furnish both grain and cattle and the Dutch were neutral. The normal landfall for all ships approaching the coast of India was the prominent cone-shaped hill known as the Friar's Hood, in Ceylon, a mark visible many miles at sea, and a frigate cruising off that part could give ample warning to a squadron in Negapatam of the approach of an enemy force. Unfortunately, Hughes, like so many British commanders in all our wars, was insufficiently provided with scouting vessels ; and this he represented in many letters.<sup>3</sup> At the same time he had demands made on him for the defence of trade against privateers in the Bay

<sup>1</sup> French squadron: one 74, two 64, one 50. British squadron: one 74, four 64.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes to Hillsborough, July 7th, 1780.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Among several others: "I beg you will be pleased to inform their Lordships that His Majesty's service in this country being in the highest degree distressed from want of frigates and sloops of war, I have directed the Naval Storekeeper to purchase a ship at this port which will make an excellent sloop of war of 18 guns."—Hughes to Secretary of State, January 2nd, 1781.



of Bengal, in the Straits of Malacca and Sunda, off Borneo, and as far West as Muscat, and it was not possible to meet all these claims as well as provide the squadron with an adequate scouting force.

The probability of French intervention appeared to increase in the latter days of August, when news came from Bombay of the arrival of a further naval reinforcement at Mauritius,<sup>1</sup> which brought their squadron very nearly up to the strength of his own. Information from the Cape showed great French activity. False Bay was full of ships and transports. "The French," wrote van Plettenburg, the Governor of the Cape, "have some undertaking of consequence in view . . . a great number of troops, and in whole regiments, are being sent thither (Mauritius). Their present naval force is able to resist the English in India, besides a squadron which will probably come under the command of M. de Ternay . . ." Bombay, in van Plettenburg's opinion, was the destination of the French armament, an interpretation of the situation which corresponded with an appreciation written by de Bussy. The Council at Bombay was of the same opinion, and was fully convinced that the topsails of the French squadron would appear before long; and they wrote to the Admiral urging him to sail to their defence at once. For the time, however, Hughes was convinced that the danger was greater on the Coromandel coast, and he continued to cruise between Negapatam and Nagore with the intention of remaining in that station until mid-September when, owing to the short time that would then be left for operations on that coast before the breaking of the monsoon, the probability would be that any French force then coming to India would go direct to Bombay.

<sup>1</sup> Ajax, 64; Elephant, 36; Argus. The Ajax had left Brest, in company with the Protée, to escort a convoy to Mauritius. Digby with a division of Rodney's fleet, returning from that officer's relief of Gibraltar, fell in with the convoy on February 24th, on the coast of Spain. The Protée was taken and the convoy scattered.

The time for his intended departure had almost arrived when news of a serious character reached him which, in his opinion, made it imperative that he should not run even the comparatively remote risk of a landing of French troops at this late season. A force of about 400 Europeans and 300 sepoys under Colonel Baillie had been cut to pieces by Hyder Ali on September 10th; and the main body of the army in the Carnatic under Sir Hector Munro, after losing some 500 men and much baggage, had had to fall back to within a few miles of the outskirts of Madras, which itself was threatened by Hyder. Reinforcement of the army at Madras was now the most pressing and immediate necessity. Two ships were sent with haste to Masulipatam to bring 800 sepoys from thence and another to Vizagapatam for 300 more. Simultaneously with the receipt of the news of Baillie's disaster a despatch from London arrived which made the future outlook dark. A French squadron of seven capital ships with 700 troops on board was reported to have sailed for the East—information which corresponded with what he had been told to expect before he had left England.

A refit of the squadron before the French arrived—for clean bottoms and speed would be essential if his now inferior force was to play any part in hindering the efforts of the enemy—was essential; but he must postpone his departure from the danger spot until the last possible moment. He decided to hold on until mid-October when all reasonable chance of a landing would have gone, and then go to Bombay. In this sombre situation he could not refrain from taking the opportunity of reminding Warren Hastings of his views on the need of making a speedy peace with the Mahrattas. "I have not a doubt," he wrote on September 14th, the day after getting the news of the French reinforcement, "that a regular plan of operations is settled between him (Hyder Ali) and the French, and that a very large body of regular troops will by some means or other be sent to Hyder's assistance. Strongly impressed as I am with this certainty,

and the possibility and even probability that the French may bring a superior naval force into these seas, I think it my indisputable duty to warn you, Sir and Gentlemen, of the evident necessity there now exists to guard not only the Company's territories on this coast, but even Fort St. George itself from the arms of France and Hyder Ali at this time when the whole national strength is required to make head against the combined force of France, Spain and our rebellious Colonies. And that this may be the more effectually and easily done, I most earnestly wish and recommend that, laying aside all other plans of operation against the Mahrattas or any other Country Powers, the three Presidencies do heartily concur by every means both of men, money and treaties to reduce this habitual foe to the English nation within due bounds ; in the effecting of which and every other service for the public good you may be assured of my most ready concurrence and best assistance."

Concentration of effort to reduce the most dangerous enemy was his policy. That enemy was Hyder. His past record, his present strength, the proximity of his army to Madras, the fact that he was the Country Power most probably in alliance with France, brought Hughes to the inevitable conclusion that all other considerations should give way to concentrating every possible effort against this single enemy. All dissipation of strength in other campaigns should be avoided. There were, moreover, prospects that a satisfactory peace with the Mahrattas might be concluded, for Popham had just made his brilliant capture of Gwalior which completed the expulsion of the Mahrattas from the country of the Rana : and Bombay and its territory were now secure.

The reply from Calcutta<sup>1</sup> informed him that peace with the Mahrattas, which they had long wished for, had been resolved on. A reinforcement of 625 Europeans, under

<sup>1</sup> Hastings and the Council at Fort William (Phillip Francis, Ed. Wheeler and Eyre Coote) to Hughes, October 1780. *Ad. Sec.*, i, 749.

Eyre Coote himself, was being sent from Bengal to Madras, where Coote was to assume command ; and a further four or five battalions would follow within a month. Money, grain and provisions, all badly needed, were also on their way. The Council suggested that, as Hughes was now on his way to Bombay, he could render helpful service with the squadron in the form of a diversion, by attacking Hyder's ports and ships on the Malabar coast, and by giving relief to the Company's settlement at Tellicherry, now closely besieged by 3,000 of Hyder's troops with 6,000 Nairs and Moplahs and 20 guns ; and his advice was invited as to whether it should be evacuated.

This letter reached Hughes on November 7th off Galle, where he had been obliged to put in for repairs. So soon as he was ready he sailed for Tellicherry and held a consultation with the local Committee as to whether the settlement should be abandoned. It was unanimously agreed not to do so. Not only was there the loss of prestige in giving up a place that had been in the Company's hands since 1708, but there were the lives of the 30,000 people who had collected within the settlement under British protection and had aided in its defence. These folk could not be removed, and honour forbade surrendering them into the hands of Hyder Ali. To continue to hold it was moreover not wholly without compensation, for the besieging of it was occupying no less than 3,000 of Hyder's troops and keeping them from the Carnatic. Provisions, stores and ammunition were therefore thrown into the town, together with a reinforcement to the garrison of 108 of the squadron's Marines.

The relief occupied a week. Hyder's fleet at Mangalore was the next thing to destroy. This force had infested the coast, hampered trade, and threatened the supplies of Tellicherry and Anjengo ; its destruction was a factor in security of the settlements. Leaving Tellicherry on October 5th, Hughes came off Mangalore on the morning of December

8th. In the harbour he could distinguish two grabships, two ketches, a snow and several gallivats flying Hyder's colours. He determined to attack them at once with the boats of the squadron. Twenty-two boats were quickly manned, armed and assembled alongside the *Superb*; the Bombay Marine ships *Drake* and *Eagle*—the only available light draft vessels, for the *Coventry* had been left on the Coromandel coast to protect the trade—were detailed to cover the advance of the boats. The shore batteries opened fire, the ships replied, the boats pulled bravely in-shore, and within a very short time two grab ships, of 26 and 24 guns, were captured, the ketches were burnt, ten gallivats were taken and a number of vessels were run on shore. It was not possible fully to complete the destruction as there were not enough light draft vessels to get into the shoal inner waters; but the blow rendered Hyder's Navy for the present innocuous and Hughes hoped finally to dispose of what remained on his return with the help of some troops from Bombay. The whole operation was carried through with spirit and promptitude.

With his ships very foul after their two years off the ground Hughes reached Bombay on December 20th. He at once attended the Select Committee to discuss the whole situation in the light of the latest intelligence from Mauritius and of Coote's opinion, which the General had written to him at length.

The most recent news from Mauritius was that the French squadron had now been increased to six ships of about 60 guns, eleven frigates, and some powerful 24- and 32-gun privateers. Eight thousand troops, with sea transport enough to carry them, were said to be on the island. To oppose an invasion by this force Hughes had five of the line and three frigates. The invasion might be made on either coast after the middle of January, but the enemy's difficulties were greatest on the Coromandel coast as there were no ports in French hands, though, to counteract this, Hyder's army had occupied Porto Novo and might be able to provide

the necessary landing facilities there. The landing might also be made in one of Hyder's ports on the Malabar coast—Mangalore or Onore. While the enemy had thus at least a three-fold choice as to where they would land, the forces of the British commanders on land and sea could not ensure meeting him with even equal force anywhere. The squadron, inferior to the enemy's, could not be divided; the army had its hands full with Hyder and the Mahrattas; and no increase was possible as the treasury was depleted. Hughes was not exaggerating when he wrote to Lord Hillsborough from Madras, just before sailing, "I think I may venture to say that unless we preserve a clear superiority at sea in India and a speedy period is put to the ruinous war with the Mahrattas, the affairs of the Company in this part of the world will be in great danger in a very short space of time."

Coote took a similar view. He deplored the policy which had resulted in estranging both Hyder and the Mahrattas, especially in view of the wretched condition of the army. On his arrival at Madras he was horrified to find to what a condition mismanagement and neglect had reduced it: for bad as he had known it to be, it was far worse than he had imagined. Instead of the eight or ten battalions which he had been assured were available, there were not efficient men to form more than three, and even these were scattered in small garrisons and must be concentrated before they could possibly offer any opposition to Hyder.

Garrisons were admittedly desirable, but the dissipation of force, brought about largely by the calls made by local authorities and agents, was wholly excessive.<sup>1</sup> These must

<sup>1</sup> Coote gave the following disposition of the European troops in garrisons:

<i>Place.</i>	<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Art.</i>	<i>Place.</i>	<i>Inf.</i>	<i>Art.</i>
The Mount . . .	—	266	Tanjore . . .	243	46
Fort St. George . .	538	10	Vellore . . .	547	—
Poonamalee . . .	399	—	Vizagapatam . .	172	88
Trichinopoly . . .	329	40	Inferior garrisons .	120	55

making a total of 2,357 infantry and 505 artillery which, if brought together, would make a respectable force.

be reduced and a field army formed of the utmost strength, and stationed in the south where it could act as a check to the Nizam in the supposed design against the Circars, or to move to the support of the army operating against Hyder or the French.

Coote was as fully convinced as Hughes of the need for an active and intense campaign against Hyder, and of the true relation of the several factors in the situation. If the position of the Company in India were to be made secure, Hyder must be beaten. This demanded two things—a concentration of all available force against him and steps to prevent him from receiving the help of the French. The British must strengthen all their forces by resolutely cutting out from their policy everything that produced dissipation of force. There were two courses of action which would contribute to this result—the abandoning of the policy of small scattered garrisons, and the making of peace with the Mahrattas. The second of these would permit the transfer of the Bombay forces from the north to the Malabar coast, where they could effectively create a diversion. Success in the Carnatic would render it difficult for the French to give assistance; for if Hyder's army were driven from the coast, the French forces would, in the first place, have nowhere to land and in the second would be incapable of doing any service. An army landed from Mauritius might indeed be slipped ashore in the absence of the British squadron; but it would be an army without transport, unable to move a day's march from its place of disembarkation. As Wellington said at a later date, in India armies must walk; there are no canals, rivers or other means of getting about; and their food must walk with them.<sup>1</sup> A great supply of draught cattle and carts was essential, and this the French could not possibly obtain if Hyder were driven from the coast.

<sup>1</sup> *Recollections of Samuel Rogers*, p. 203. Notes of a conversation with the Duke of Wellington. The Duke said he had marched his troops in thirty-three hours a distance of seventy-two miles.

The conclusion to which these considerations brought Coote was that the most effective use of the squadron would be, as soon as a Mahratta peace had been arranged, to work in concert with the Bombay forces in creating a diversion on the Malabar coast, and this he asked Hughes to do, so far as it was in his power. "I trust," he wrote, "that by our joint endeavour we may restore the interests in the nation in this quarter of the world to their wonted flourishing state."<sup>1</sup> Nothing indeed is more refreshing to read throughout this period than Coote's clear appreciation of the interdependence of the sea and land forces, his persistent reiteration of the words "joint endeavour" and "co-operation," and his interpretation of their true spirit. It is illustrated in his acts no less than his correspondence with the Admiral, in which, besides setting out his own views and intentions, he gave Hughes copies of all his more important instructions to his own subordinates, Goddard, Munro and Stewart.

Coote's proposal for operations in Malabar presupposed that no French squadron arrived on the coast, or that these various movements could be undertaken before it arrived. Hughes concurred. His intentions, as expressed to the Madras Committee, were to co-operate with Goddard on the Malabar coast so long as the season permitted and unless he had certain information of a French squadron on the Coromandel coast: "in which case I shall immediately push at the enemy there. But if no such force arrives on your coast and a peace is happily concluded between us and the Mahrattas, I am of the opinion that General Goddard's army, aided by His Majesty's squadron under my command, might render signal services against Hyder and relieve the Carnatic."

Thus the naval and military commanders were in general agreement as to the need for a Mahratta peace. The Governor-General and Council at Calcutta realised the need

<sup>1</sup> Coote to Hughes, November 12th, 1780.



no less than they. But while the principal civil authorities thus concurred in the necessity there was a radical difference between them and the commanders on sea and land as to the means by which it was to be attained. Was peace to be got by accommodation or by force? With an apparent reversal of the rôles the fighting officers desired accommodation, though some sacrifice should be necessary—sacrifice even of prestige—while the civil authorities would hear of no peace that was not the result of successful military operation. According to them, overtures must not come from the British, but must be extorted from the Mahrattas. When the news of Baillie's disaster reached Calcutta, Hastings and the Council sent orders to Bombay that peace was to be obtained as soon as possible, but to obtain it the operations against the Mahrattas were to be prosecuted with the utmost vigour until the Confederation should be compelled to sue for it.

The Council of Bombay was of a similar opinion. Agreeing that no effectual help could be given to the Carnatic unless the diversion of strength against the Mahrattas ceased, they considered that the shortest road to peace was the road to Poona. Nor had they any doubt that the forces they possessed were capable of striking a decisive blow at the Mahratta capital, and, in addition, of sparing two battalions to hold Tellicherry. The course of action they favoured was, first, to capture Arnaul, a fort which lies at the entrance of the river that forms the northern boundary of Bassein, and so to secure their conquest of Bassein (which had been taken in December) against attack when the troops were engaged elsewhere; and then for Goddard's army to march upon Poona and deliver a crushing stroke.

Thus, when Hughes met the Council at Bombay on his arrival this was the plan that was put before him, in which he was invited to co-operate in the capture of Arnaul. To this request he promptly acceded, sending the Worcester and Coventry to attend upon the army. Upon the prospects

of ultimate success in crushing Mahratta resistance at Poona he properly refrained from expressing an opinion, but he strongly suspected that peace was not so much an object of the Select Committee as expansion of their territory; and he was convinced that the Committee did not fully realise how pressingly the need for peace was indicated by the strategical situation. Feeling that this was the sentiment of the Committee he took upon himself the responsibility of sending a letter to the Peshwa, in the capacity of the representative in India of the King, urging him to make peace with the Company and assuring the Mahratta chief that he himself would give him the best security he could that peace would be good and binding on all the Company's Governors. The Peshwa replied with a question. How could they repose any confidence that a change in Government might not produce a change in policy? Such changes, he said, they had experienced. Had not Hastings himself revoked the Convention of Worgaon? Peace, he concluded—with disarming politeness—was certainly desirable: but—who had caused the war? This refusal only convinced Hughes that the Mahrattas had no intention of accepting the sort of terms the Company was prepared to offer, and that the true policy was to concentrate on Hyder and beat him. “If we should succeed in driving Hyder out of the Carnatic the Mahrattas will then treat for peace.”<sup>1</sup>

So the operations continued. Arnaul was brilliantly taken by Goddard, and the expedition to Poona was begun in February. But his force was too small for the attempt, and skilful commander as he was, Goddard could not perform impossibilities. By March it was evident that the expedition could not succeed against superior numbers. He was ordered to withdraw and he reached Panwely only after most serious fighting in which he incurred heavy losses. So the unsatisfactory and wasteful war continued, to the

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Lord Hillsborough, March 20th, 1781.

detriment of the operations against Hyder, for no troops were available to create the diversion against Hyder which was so urgently called for by the situation on the Coromandel coast.

On that coast, Coote, who reached Madras in November, could do nothing until he had reorganised the Company's forces. Hyder in the meantime had his own way. He took Arcot, established himself there, and detached his son Tippoo against several British posts—Chingleput, Wandewash, Permacol, Amboor and Vellore—and though the others held out Amboor surrendered on January 13th. On January 17th, Coote, having reorganised the forces, marched out of Madras to relieve these garrisons with an army of 7,400, of whom 1,600 were Europeans. Short of transport bullocks and wheeled transport he was dependent for his supplies upon communications by water and a flotilla of small craft therefore brought his supplies down the coast from Madras. While the communications of the armies were thus seaborne, Madras itself depended for its food wholly upon what came from Bengal by the same route. Thus, both the Army and the Headquarters of the Presidency were at the mercy of whoever should be able to exercise command at sea long enough to starve either the one or the other into surrender.

Moving on Carangooly, a post of consequence, Coote captured it on January 21st. He immediately turned westward towards Wandewash, which he relieved on the 24th, and marched towards Permacol on the 28th. Alarmed, Hyder now moved with his whole army from Arcot to interrupt these successes. Then, at this critical moment, with the armies making these movements which promised to result in driving Hyder from the coast, a new factor suddenly entered upon the scene. On February 25th a French squadron of nine ships<sup>1</sup> appeared off Pulicat; and

<sup>1</sup> Orient, 74; Brillant, Sévère, Bizarre, Ajax, 64; Flamand, 50; Consolante, 40; Subtile, 24; Expédition, 12.

at the same time two powerful privateers of 32 and 18 guns were reported operating off the mouth of the Ganges and on the coast to the northward of Madras, endangering the main line of supplies of food to the Southern Presidency.

The Mauritius squadron which thus made its inopportune appearance was under the command of M. d'Orves, who had succeeded Tronjoly in command. It had left the islands, where it had done no service of any value, on October 14th previously. Sailing too late for operations on the Coromandel coast, it had gone to Acheen, and from thence sailed for India in January, when the coast is again practicable. No sooner was the news of its arrival conveyed to Hyder than he took steps to profit by its co-operation. If his army could cut off Coote's army from Madras by land, the squadron, intercepting the British supplies by water, would be able to complete the severance of the British communications. As supplies could not be obtained from elsewhere Coote's surrender, with all the far-reaching consequences, must inevitably follow.

Coote, who was then at Wandewash, was no less impressed with the seriousness of the situation. On learning of the arrival of the fleet, he at once started to return to Madras, but misled by incorrect intelligence that supplies of food could be obtained at Pondicherry<sup>1</sup> he went thither to destroy the surf boats which would be essential to the French for landing troops, guns or military stores. The report of supplies proved, however, illusory, and therefore, after offering battle to Hyder, who refused, and being unable for lack of food to move northward, he left Pondicherry and turned southward again to Cuddalore in hopes of finding provision there. Hyder at once moved into the garrisonless Pondicherry, and there d'Orves anchored on January 29th, after making a feeble approach to the shipping in Madras, where the whole of the supplies of Coote's army lay afloat, inadequately protected by the batteries. Coote was now

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, vol. iii, p. 448.

isolated by land and sea, and the game appeared to be wholly in his enemies' hands. Hyder at once called upon d'Orves, explained the situation, indicated the help needed, and invited his co-operation : but d'Orves, to the disappointment and astonishment of the Mysorean leader, flatly declined to give any assistance. He refused either to remain on the coast long enough to bring about the surrender of Coote's army by cutting its sea communications, or to land any of his Europeans to assist Hyder on land.

The conduct of the French Commander appears so singular, so contrary to every dictate of common sense, that the causes from which it sprang deserve examination. Was it a personal defect in the Commander, or was it the result of a system ? To the present writer it appears mainly to be the latter that is to blame. Rigorous obedience to orders was one mark of the French system of command under the Monarchy, and the officer who departed from his orders in any way risked his whole professional career, if not his very freedom.

D'Orves, when he took over the command of the squadron from Tronjoly towards the end of 1780, was not content to remain idly at Port Louis. His instructions made the security of the islands his principal object, but he recognised that, strongly garrisoned, they were in no danger. A squadron was also expected from Europe, and he was directed to await its arrival before beginning any operations. To d'Orves this seemed a waste of time and opportunity. He had under his command a squadron at least equal to that of the British in India, and this reinforcement could not arrive before the following May ; that is to say, six months hence. Was he to pass these six months swinging round his anchors in Port Louis ?

By the system in force, the Commander of the squadron was subordinate to, and under the direct orders of, the Governor of the islands—a system frequently pressed for by the British Colonial Governors in the West Indies, as well as

by Lord Macartney, when Governor of Madras, but consistently opposed and rejected by the British Admiralty. Only by permission of the Governor could d'Orves leave the island. He pressed for this permission and for freedom to act, and eventually persuaded the Governor to permit him to proceed, but only under the most stringent qualifications that he should not engage in any operations which would injure his ships and call for repairs, or prevent them from acting with the reinforcement due from France in May; nor was he to land any of his men.

Of what use, then, was it for him to sail at all? If he was not to fight; if he was to avoid any injuries; if, whatever might be the situation he should find on the coast of India, he was to be back in Port Louis without fail before April, what then was the object of his visiting the coast? According to his own statement it was "to show the Indian Princes forces that would give them confidence in our power and in our disposition to join with their's and assist them in the war in which they were engaged with their enemies, and induce them to persist in it."<sup>1</sup> It was, in fact, no more than a political demonstration. To d'Orves, it would appear, these orders of the Governor constituted a binding command. No matter that when he should arrive he should find a situation of almost inestimable possibilities, he could do nothing. Such a situation he found—himself with an absolute command at sea which, even on the most unfavourable computation, could not be disputed for at least four weeks, and would in all probability last longer. He found the only British Army in Southern India surrounded on land, shut in to Cuddalore: nor could he fail to be acquainted with its shortage of provisions, for of this Hyder was well aware. Now the French squadron was in a position to close the last channel by which supplies could reach the army. Its investment was completed.

But d'Orves's orders were precise, and the system under

<sup>1</sup> Chevalier, p. 377.

which he had been brought up did not encourage the growth of the spirit which acts independently. "It is notorious," Macaulay has said, "that the great men who founded and preserved our Indian Empire treated all particular orders which they received from home as mere waste paper. Had not these great men had the sense and spirit so to treat such orders we should not now have had an Indian Empire."<sup>1</sup> This was not the spirit engendered in its servants by the French Monarchy. D'Orves may have had the inclination to act, as he had the inclination not to remain passively at Mauritius. His spirit, such as it was—weakly, possibly—could receive no nourishment from a system which exacts a rigid observance of orders. The probability appears to be that he was an ordinary man, possibly—though not certainly—below the average. A system of command which does not make allowance for the mentality of the ordinary man, which tends to deter him from taking responsibility instead of encouraging him to take independent action, which leaves to him the minimum of liberty of judgment and action, is a bad system. Innate power to take responsibility is rare, as St. Vincent himself frequently complained. No service can count on more than a small minority of men who will rise superior to the consideration of protecting themselves against censure and risk. Great men like Suffren and Nelson are rare. The power to take responsibility can, however, be fostered by a good system as it can be repressed by a bad one. Fearless, physically, as Suffren was, bold in expedient, bold in conception, his title to glory and greatness lies even more in his readiness always to do that which he thought right regardless of the consequences to himself which disregard of his instructions might entail. No one interpreted more correctly than he the distinction between an order given by a superior who is fully cognisant of the situation, and an order, or instructions, issued by an authority under

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay's speech on the war with China, April 7th, 1840.

totally different conditions. But d'Orves was not of that fine temper.

D'Orves found a justification for leaving the coast in the shortage of provisions and water: and the fact that he reached the islands with no more than a week's supply of rice on board may seem to condone his conduct. But there was an ample supply of this form of food to be got. Rice was coming almost daily into Madras by sea—Coote was living upon supplies imported by sea. Other provisions were to be procured at the Dutch ports—Negapatam, Batticaloa, Galle or Colombo. Water in small quantities was obtainable at Porto Novo, for though difficulties there may have been through Coote's prompt destruction of the surf boats, watering with ships' boats was possible there inside the river. To the islands, however, he departed, having missed one of the greatest opportunities ever offered in a sea-campaign, and to the infinite relief of Coote. When the French squadron bore away to sea "a prospect of procuring assistance from the northward was opened to me, and I lost not a moment in sending the intelligence of it to Madras and Sadras, where, knowing the distress I might be in, two rice vessels had previously been sent, and which I had the satisfaction of seeing come to anchor in this road on the 17th at noon. By this time the inhabitants of the town were next to starving, some absolutely had died from want, and *two days more would have completed the melancholy scene, as the troops also must have been without a grain to eat.* I need not take up your time with commenting on the conduct of the French Admiral, or describing the injuries we must have suffered, and the risks we must have run if he had acted with common spirit. I may with safety advance that we are entirely indebted to his irresolute behaviour for the little security we now enjoy on this coast."<sup>1</sup> Supplies of much needed food now came in uninterruptedly and Coote was soon able to write confidently of his power to maintain

<sup>1</sup> Coote to the Bengal Council, March 1st, 1781. Wyly, *Life of Coote*, p. 217.



himself where he was, though for want of transport he could not make any movements.<sup>1</sup>

The news of the arrival of the French squadron did not reach Hughes officially at Bombay until the second week in March, though rumour, which travels fast in India, reported it a month earlier. When he learned that the French ships had brought no troops, Hughes felt little anxiety; for he did not then know in how dangerous a situation Coote's army was at that moment. His own ships were still far from being ready, and the news of d'Orves's rapid departure reached him before he could sail. As, therefore, there was now no immediate crisis in the Carnatic he remained at Bombay to complete his refit, and to make the necessary preparations for the relief of Tellicherry and the capture of Mangalore. By the time the French returned, as he fully expected them to do, he would be on the coast "to seek the enemy even though they may be superior."

The disappointment of Goddard's stroke at Poona affected the movements of the squadron. Goddard still had hopes, towards the end of March, that the Mahratta war would be finished and that his forces would be free to co-operate with the squadron in fighting at Mangalore.<sup>2</sup> But the repulse of his army, and the elation of the Peshwa at their victory, rendered it indispensable in the opinion of the Bombay Council to recover their lost prestige. Operations against the Mahrattas must therefore continue, and the expedition to Mangalore must be laid aside. Hughes, who had waited for the army to be ready to accompany him, was now no longer needed, for the operations inland could not be helped by the squadron. So soon, therefore, as the forces for the relief and reinforcement of Tellicherry were ready, which was not until the end of April, Hughes sailed from Bombay, landed the troops at Tellicherry, and sailing thence on

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee of Madras to Hughes, February 23rd, 1781. *Ad. Sec.*, 7, 753.

<sup>2</sup> Goddard to Hughes, March 20th, 1781. *Ad. Sec.*, 7, 785.

May 16th made the best of his way to Cuddalore, bringing with him from Tellicherry the Madras troops which had been sent thither for its security in October. Reaching Cuddalore on May 15th, he found Coote on the point of moving on the morrow against Hyder in order to prevent his interference with a body of troops then approaching Ellore under Colonel Pearce, which had marched from Bengal to join the Madras army. The Admiral landed at once and conferred with the General as to how the squadron could best help the army. Coote's principal need was freedom of movement by sea. For want of transport he was still unable to move more than one day's march from the settlement, for the country had been completely devastated and no supplies existed near Cuddalore: the forces of the enemy held all the approaches by land. The Tanjore district also, which usually supplied Madras with grain, had been thoroughly plundered; while to complete his distress, his money was exhausted and he had no prospects of a further supply. "I confess I shudder for the consequences," he had written to Hughes on April 21st. If peace had been made with the Mahrattas this alarming situation would not have arisen, but "as it is," he continued, "and if no steps are taken for a speedy accommodation I think with you that the total ruin of the British interests in India must ensue." In the meanwhile, moreover, Hyder was trying to engage the Mahrattas in his cause, though fortunately the aid they had offered—5,000 horse—was insufficient seriously to affect the situation. But the prospects of the return of the French squadron were far more serious, and the appearance of Hughes was doubly welcome for the security it promised against attack from that quarter and for the protection it could give to the essential supplies of the army against attacks by the small armed craft of the enemy which sailed from Porto Novo and cut up his vessels bringing the rice from Madras.

Dependent as Coote's movements thus were upon supplies,

Hughes's were no less so. In spite of his long delay at Bombay he had left there with no more than six weeks' water on board,<sup>1</sup> and after his four weeks at sea he was already running short. To begin a campaign, in which an enemy squadron would probably take part, with his ships short of water would have been highly improvident, and, therefore, after spending four days landing the supplies from the grain ships, he sailed for Madras on June 1st to replenish, previous to taking up his old cruising and covering station to windward between Nagore and Negapatam. Once more the lack of small craft proved a serious disadvantage. He needed them to scout for the enemy fleet, to give convoy to the trade to Madras, to deal with the privateers which had cut deep into the grain vessels off the Hoogly, and to protect Coote's line of supply further south. "The assistance of armed boats in order to take those of the enemy in Porto Novo and along the coast is absolutely necessary in order to render secure the landing of the army provisions and stores from the ships, which mode of conveyance I am forced to adopt for want of land carriage."<sup>2</sup>

Bullocks were indeed being slowly procured at Madras, but these had to be sent by sea to the army at Cuddalore, and sea transport of the necessary kind was not easy to procure. Hughes felt obliged to refuse to encumber the squadron with the animals, as he would thereby disable his ships if they should meet the enemy squadron. He did, on the other hand, embark at Madras as large a quantity of guns, stores and ammunition as he could and took them to Cuddalore; and he arranged "to give every assistance in my power consistent with the chief object of my present

<sup>1</sup> The supply arrangements were badly organised. A long correspondence took place between Hughes and the Bombay Government in which the Admiral pointed out the delays he had suffered from the totally inadequate organisation for embarking water.

<sup>2</sup> Coote to Hughes, May 7th, 1781.

pursuit," which was, to meet the French fleet without fail. A clear recognition of the enemy's main body as his principal objective, as the foundation upon which all the military operations must be built, dominated his mind as clearly as in the following year it dominated that of Suffren.

The difficulties of watering which existed at Bombay were even accentuated at Madras. The surf on the coast, even during the South-West monsoon, rendered it possible only to carry water out to the ships in the local boats, and of these there was a very inadequate number: and this is a fact for which insufficient allowance has been made by many of Hughes's critics who have accused him of dawdling and dilatoriness in the campaign of 1782. On June 14th he sailed. As he left the roads he met the *Nymph*, a small vessel carrying a person and papers of great consequence in the subsequent proceedings. The person was Lord Macartney, the new Governor of Madras. The papers informed him that a still further addition had been made to our enemies. War had been declared with the United Provinces.

For the moment there was nothing to be done to interrupt the course of the main operations, and Hughes proceeded to Porto Novo to land the munitions he was carrying for the army. Coote lay there in an awkward situation. He had attacked Chillumbrum and suffered a reverse, and Hyder had moved his army to a position cutting him off from Cuddalore and from all other districts. The sea was once more his only open channel of communications. A consultation was held at which he informed Hughes of his intention to drive Hyder from his position and open the way by land to Cuddalore. He desired that the squadron, so soon as it should have landed the stores, might take up a position to cover Cuddalore from attack and secure a safe retreat for the army, in case it should be needed, by sea. This Hughes did.

On July 1st, at 5 a.m., Coote moved out with his 8,500 men to attack some 180,000 under Hyder in a strongly entrenched

position.<sup>1</sup> The battle of Porto Novo raged till four in the afternoon, by which time the enemy had been driven from all his positions and Coote was only unable to consummate his brilliant victory with a persistent pursuit owing to his lack of cavalry and transport.

With the army thus once more in security against its enemies on land, Hughes sailed to watch for the enemy at sea, and to do what service he could against the new enemy. Two ships<sup>2</sup> were sent to destroy all Dutch ships in the Hoogly approaches, and the squadron entered Negapatam road on July 8th and cut out fourteen sail of vessels lying there, which gave Hughes a useful addition to his craft employed in carrying grain from Bengal. The squadron then proceeded to cruise in its station, which now not only covered the line of approach by the French from the islands but also blockaded Negapatam: and Negapatam was "a port, the possession of which to us is of the utmost consequence to the preservation of Tanjore and the Carnatic." That the Dutch entry into the war had given a wholly new significance to two ports—Negapatam and Trincomali—was at once obvious to Hughes: and from this moment he regarded, as the first and most essential strokes of our strategy, the capture of those two important positions.

<sup>1</sup> British Army, 8,476. Mysorean (as estimated by Coote): Infantry, 18,400. Europeans, 630; Cavalry, 40,000; Irregulars, 120,000; Artillery, 47 guns. Wyllie, *Life of Sir E. Coote*, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Coventry, 28; Chaser, 15.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EFFECTS OF THE DUTCH ENTRY INTO THE WAR

THE Nymph brought two important letters to Hughes on June 22nd. One, dated December 21st, 1780, contained a copy of the Manifesto to the States General in which their unneutral behaviour, their failure to comply with the terms of the Treaties of mutual assistance of 1674 and 1716, and their refusal to give satisfaction for the conduct of the Pensionary of Amsterdam in making a Treaty of Commerce with the United States, were set forth. It ended with the formal declaration of war. The other letter was from Lord Hillsborough to the Admiral. It told him that the Secret Committee of the East India Company were sending orders to their representatives in India to consult with him as to the best means of acting against the Dutch "by taking and destroying their men of war and other vessels, and for the invasion and conquest of their settlements, islands, and possessions in India." The Secretary of State directed Hughes to act with the Company's forces in any plans determined on.

In explaining the situation to Hughes, Lord Hillsborough summarised the attitude of the British Government in this important question of State policy: "The utmost endeavours were used," he wrote, "to dissuade the States General from the very unfriendly resolution of appointing convoys for their trade to France and Spain, which, when licit wanted no protection and would suffer no interruption from us, but when illicit could not be protected by convoy." To suffer ships with suspicious cargoes to pass unvisited to the enemy would, he said, have been contrary to every principle of wisdom and policy. A war against the united

Bourbon houses would be conducted with manifold disadvantages if Britain were not able to deprive the enemy of those succours on which the success of their operations materially depended. "These principles, so just in themselves, apply with double force to the Republic of Holland, who, by every tie of gratitude, every motive of interest, and by the clearest stipulations of positive Treaty, is bound to stand forth in our defence."<sup>1</sup> An escorted Dutch convoy was in consequence stopped by a British squadron. Permission to visit and search was refused and resisted. Shots were exchanged, and some Dutch ships were carried into harbour. Nevertheless war had not broken out in consequence.

Intent upon their immediate commercial advantages the States General had also, in direct contradiction to their own practice at sea and to the writings of their own authority, Bynkershoek, adopted the doctrine that trade in neutral bottoms was free from capture; a doctrine similarly adopted by France, but only so recently as 1778, in order to suit her immediate political ends and to injure Great Britain; though entirely contrary to the principles which had informed her practice in war hitherto. Expediency, not ethics, governed these Dutch and French decisions. When allied with Britain in 1689, the Dutch had had no hesitation in signing the Treaty of Whitehall which provided "*qu'on fasse en sorte que tout le Commerce et trafic du Roi très Chrétien soit effectivement rompu ou interdit*"—while the French "*ordonnance*" of 1681 bore harder on the neutral commerce than the British rule, for Louis XIV, revising an edict of 1584, laid down the rule not only of "*Enemy ships, enemy goods,*" but added "*Enemy goods, enemy ships*"—the goods "*infected*" the ships which became good prize.\*

<sup>1</sup> Lord Hillsborough to Hughes, January 2nd, 1780. The letter illustrates the extent to which Secretaries of State were at the pains to put naval commanders in possession of information concerning policy.

<sup>2</sup> Spain adopted the same rule in 1716.

Britain however, and not unnaturally, firmly refused to countenance this innovation, an innovation originating in the non-maritime state of Prussia a score of years earlier ; and she declared her intention of acting, as hitherto, conformably to the Law of Nations. Neutral commerce would be treated with proper consideration : and the Courts of Admiralty would decide with strict equity in any question that arose.

Still, no war with Holland arose out of that Armed Neutrality sponsored by Catherine of Russia which the States General had eagerly joined. But the existing tension was increased, and irritation with Holland became intense.

Matters came eventually to a head in September 1780, through the discovery of a draft of a secret Treaty of Commerce and Alliance drawn up between the Pensionary of Amsterdam and the American Commissioner. When called upon to disavow the Treaty and to give satisfaction for the behaviour of the Pensionary, the Dutch gave the desired disavowal but refused the satisfaction. On December 20th Britain declared war upon the States General.

Among the immediate steps taken by the British Ministry was the preparation of an expedition to the Cape of Good Hope. A second enclosure to Lord Hillsborough's letter contained the further information that it had been decided to send thither three thousand King's troops, under a very strong naval escort. If the Cape were taken, the troops were to remain there as a garrison, but if the attempt proved unsuccessful two thousand of the troops were to proceed direct to India to reinforce the army there.

If there be one principle of war in war which stands out, pre-eminent among others, the violation of which infallibly calls down retribution, it is the employment of force upon enterprises which do not contribute to the attainment of the principal object of the war. What, if any, relation had an expedition to capture Dutch possession at the Cape of



Good Hope to the object of the war? Would the loss of the colony by the Dutch, or the gain of the Colony by the British, affect the struggle with the Powers engaged? The answer lies in the answers to two other questions. What was the object of the war? By what means was this object to be attained?

By this time—the beginning of 1781—the hopes no less than the practical possibilities of recovering the Northern Colonies had practically disappeared. American loyalty was not then to be re-conquered even if it were possible to conquer American fighting men. The King himself knew it to be impossible to keep Pennsylvania or recover New York: but he would not yet even contemplate acknowledging American independence. The policy he proposed was “to retain his garrisons at New York and on Rhode Island, in Canada, and in Florida: to withdraw all the rest of his troops from America; and to employ them in attacking the French and Spanish possessions in the West Indies.”<sup>1</sup> Associated with this there was to be a policy of raids on the coast towns from the sea and on inland towns by Indians: the result of which, it was supposed, would “make them come into what Great Britain decently consent to.”<sup>2</sup> This intention received expression in an instruction issued to Lord Howe on March 22nd, 1778, nine days after the letter quoted above. “We judge it necessary,” wrote the Board, “to inform your Lordship that *the object of the war being now changed* and the contest in America being a secondary consideration, the principal object must now be the distressing

<sup>1</sup> Trevelyan, *George III and Charles Fox*, vol. i, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> After the receipt, in January 1777, of the news of the surrender at Saratoga the King wrote to Lord North “after the disaster of Burgoyne not less than an additional army to what is there at present of 40,000 men, can carry on with any effort an offensive land war—that a sea war is the only wise plan; and that the preventing the arrival of Military stores cloathing and other articles necessary from Europe must distress and make them consent to what Britain may decently consent to.”—King George III to Lord North, January 13th, 1778. Fortescue, *Papers of King George III*, vol. ii.

France and securing His Majesty's own possessions against any hostile attempts."<sup>1</sup>

Thus France was now the principal enemy and the principal object of the war had now become to distress France and defend British possessions. The only way by which France could be distressed was by the use of force in those parts where it was possible for Britain to bring superior force to bear: that is to say, in her oversea possessions or her commerce.

For this purpose superiority at sea, either general or in the vital areas, needed to be established. General superiority, as Anson had pointed out twenty-two years earlier, could never be attained. It entailed dissipation of force and weakness everywhere. What was needed was superiority in the vital areas, a powerful force, capable of dealing with the main enemy concentrations and by its pressure simultaneously achieving a part of the other object—the distressing of the enemy—by the stoppage of French commerce; and other detached naval forces adequate to give direct protection to those military forces sent oversea to distress France by the capture of her oversea possessions, or for the defence of our own possessions and interests against similar forms of attack. Thus any action which either directly weakened the enemy's actual strength at sea, or, by preventing the developments of her strength in outer seas, diminished the amount of dissipation of British naval strength, was one directly contributing to the attainment of the object of the war.

The Eastern Trade of Britain was of national importance more especially since trade with the American Colonies had come to an end. Its maintenance was essential to the national life, its defence therefore a matter of national interest. It was vulnerable, mainly in three principal areas, the approaches to the British Channel, the seas round India,

<sup>1</sup> Secret Instructions, March 22nd, 1778. *Ad. Sec.*, 2, 3334. The italics are the present writer's.

and the neighbourhood of St. Helena, the port of call and rendezvous of the homeward-bound shipping. Lesser foci were the Malacca Straits, Sunda Strait and Banca Strait for the less important, though far from negligible, trade from China ; and off the Agulhas Bank in the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>1</sup>

For the trade of the Channel, a superior squadron to the westward in combination with the Channel escorts was the well-tryed and proved defence. In the Indian Waters, trade was mainly vulnerable at sea in the approaches to the three important centres, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and on land, in the territories which served the purposes of trade, produced the revenues, and furnished the means of defence. All of these vulnerable areas could be secured provided Britain was in possession of superior sea power, in the presence of which serious attack neither at sea nor on land could be developed. Injury could be done by sporadic attack by the smaller types of vessel, the frigate, the privateer or the local armed ship, for defence against which large numbers of similar vessels were needed.

Sea power cannot exist without the means of maintaining large squadrons of ships ; that is, bases. The base upon which French sea power in the Indies depended was, as we have seen, Mauritius. "The Island of Mauritius is viewed by their Ministry," wrote the Chairman of the Secret Committee to the Secretary of State in August 1781, "in the same light as ours do Gibraltar ; as this is the key of the Mediterranean, the French consider Mauritius the key of the Indian Ocean, and are in consequence determined to render it impregnable." With this object forts had been erected, troops poured in, a militia created, and the island's local means of defence so developed that impregnable it undoubtedly was to attack by such forces as either India or

<sup>1</sup> "The homeward-bound trade is now exposed to attacks from the French cruisers at Mauritius who by stretching across from Cape Infanta to lat. 37° S. may intercept many of them."—Hughes to Lord Weymouth, August 14th, 1779.

the Home Government could produce or spare at this time. Fortresses, however, like countries or armies, impregnable though they may be to assault, are not necessarily immune to investment: for none are capable of indefinite self-support. A small fortress, if too great a demand is not made upon its supplies, may be able to resist for a long time, but resist though it may, its value in war may be reduced, if not destroyed, by reducing its capacity to furnish the forces operating from it with the means of acting; of which two are outstandingly important—food, and the materials of war. A base which cannot supply a fighting force ceases to have any significance, for it cannot fulfil its purposes; and although it may occupy a position which is often compared to a “Key,” by those with fondness for words it is then, in reality, of no more importance than is a sentry box without a sentry.<sup>1</sup>

Mauritius was barely self-supporting beyond the needs of its actual inhabitants in spite of the efforts of the Ministry since 1769 to increase its resources by cultivation. No sooner was the population increased by a large addition of troops and seamen, than she was unable to feed it. The Island's dependence upon food from without had been noticed for some years. Harland had called attention to it in 1771. Lindsay, on his way home in 1772, had suggested that if the home-coming East Indiamen should load with corn at the Cape, buying up all the available supplies, it would be difficult for the French to subsist their forces in any dangerous strength at the Mauritius. Hughes and Vernon had been well aware that the French drew very large quantities of provisions from the Cape, and that a constant service of ships was maintained, escorted by men of war, some of them flûtes, in bringing corn and cattle from the Cape, and, to a lesser degree, from Madagascar. In spite

<sup>1</sup> The extinction of the coasting trade with Brest in the Napoleonic wars so effectively deprived that arsenal of supplies that it ceased to be able to maintain a large fleet.

of the attempts of the French Government to develop, with admirable foresight, the productive capacity of the Island, Hughes saw that "they must depend chiefly on the Cape for the future support of Mauritius"; and he had suggested that a squadron should be stationed at False Bay between May and August to interrupt the supplies passing from the Cape to the Islands. This would serve the further purpose of giving protection to the homeward-bound Indian Trade, which was exposed to attack from the French cruisers at Mauritius.<sup>1</sup> The consumption of food naturally increased as the number of men-of-war, merchant ships and troops increased; and already in 1779 great anxiety was reported to exist in the Island from having a far greater population than it could feed, even with a continual service of shipping to the Cape. "If the convoy now going out, or some of the supplies that are constantly going from the Cape, could be interrupted, there is not a doubt that the Islands would be greatly distressed."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, realising the possibility of a breach with Holland, Hughes sent, about a fortnight later (Sept. 5th), a description of the Dutch establishments at the Cape and in the East, with an outline of the defences at the Cape and of the force required for its capture.

Thus it had been fully recognised for some years that the Cape was an essential factor in enabling Mauritius to fulfil the functions of a base: that its capture would reduce the power of France to maintain troops and ships in the Indian Ocean, and thereby would enable a greater concentration of British sea power to be effected in those areas where offensive operations could be conducted.

In a second, and not unimportant, degree the capture of the Cape affected the maintenance of the Eastern trade. An enemy squadron using it as a base could—as Tronjoly

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Weymouth, August 14th, 1779.

<sup>2</sup> Report from a resident lately returned after 40 years at Mauritius, March 1st, 1780. *Home Misc.* 144.

and d'Orves had done—cruise for the East Indiamen rounding the Cape. But the area was large, shipping could stretch to the southward, and such cruising as had been tried there during this war had not interrupted the flow of trade. One very valuable capture, the Indiaman Osterley—worth, it was said, £300,000—had been made; but that was the sum of its successes. What was more serious was the danger to St. Helena that would follow if the Cape were in the hands of an enemy. St. Helena was the third important focus of the trade, the port of call for refreshment and the rendezvous for convoys and escorts of the homeward-bound trade; a place without which the ships could not be supplied, nor protection be assured through the danger zone in Home Waters. It was to St. Helena that escorts were sent from England to meet the homeward-bound ships, of whose probable date of arrival the Company informed themselves in advance by the overland route through Egypt, and notified the Admiralty. This occurred usually in June. Of this the French were naturally well aware; and we have seen that French and American vessels were reported to be destined to cruise in the St. Helena area in the early days of the war. A plan for their doing so, in the preliminary stages, had been intercepted by the British Intelligence. In the Seven Years' War, both d'Estaing and Frogier de l'Éguille had proposed the capture of the Island,<sup>1</sup> and Kerguelen had pointed out in 1780 the benefits the retention of the Island would confer on the British, the injuries to them which would result from its loss. His papers, seized on board the *Libre Navicateur*, contained a complete plan for taking it.

Now that the United Provinces had entered the war, the Cape had become an enemy base. No great activity, it is true, was feared from the Dutch themselves; but it was more than probable that the French would make active use of it, possibly permanently, but if not, at least until

<sup>1</sup> Lacour Gayet, *La Marine Militaire sous Louis XV*, p. 410.

the end of the war. Nothing would be easier to them than to despatch ships and troops to take the Island of St. Helena. Even, however, if they refrained from so doing, the situation of St. Helena would probably become serious, or an increased burden put upon British shipping: for, like Mauritius, the Island was not self-supporting and depended largely on the Cape for supplies. These supplies would now cease, and St. Helena would be unable to support the increased garrison which the strong enemy forces at the Cape would call for, and to supply the shipping calling there after a long voyage from India or China.

Thus, the capture of the Cape was not a mere ex-centric operation, an attempt to profit by the occasion and add new territory to the Empire. It was a direct contribution to the object as defined in the letter to Lord Howe. If the expedition of 1781 had succeeded, Suffren could not have shaken the existence of the Empire in India in 1782 and 1783, nor would it, in all probability, have been necessary to weaken the forces in Home Waters by the detachment sent under Bickerton in 1782.

The land force prepared for the capture of Good Hope consisted of about 3,000 troops. Some of them had already been assembled for a different purpose, for on August 3rd, 1780, the Cabinet had approved a plan of an expedition to the South Seas by way of India. The advantages expected from this expedition were threefold. Spain would suffer commercial losses which would make her inclined to retire from the war. The East India Company would extend its trade by getting possession of new territories and new engagements with Eastern Princes—the great wealth of Mindanao was particularly referred to. And next, aid would be given to stimulate the dangerous insurrectionary movement in the Spanish South American Colonies. Those movements, which culminated later in the independence of the great South American States, were at that time germinating. Aid from without, such as France was giving the

British Northern Colonists, might prove to be all that was needed to weaken Spain as a European Power by the loss of her colonial markets. The very threat of the loss might weaken her strategically, by obliging her to divert force from European waters. Finally, if the Dutch should come into the war, their Spice Islands would be taken.

The principle of using force with these thoroughly unsound objects having been accepted by the Cabinet, the question of the actual organisation of the expedition came under review ; of which the first matter to decide was from whence the Expedition should sail, England or India. This was discussed at length by Lord Sandwich in a Memorandum,<sup>1</sup> in which he proposed that it should sail from England. The plan finally agreed upon was to send 2,000 Royal troops from England, to be joined by 2,000 sepoys, to capture Mindanao, and subsequently to attack the "capital" Islands in the Archipelago and the Spanish settlements in South America, expressly providing that if any attack by the European enemies should be made, the whole of the naval and military forces should be added to the forces in India until all danger from attacks should have ceased.<sup>2</sup> The Navy Board was ordered to take up 4,000 tons of troop transport and store-ships,<sup>3</sup> and the East India Company was desired to furnish two 40-gun ships.

At the moment when war was declared against the United Provinces this expedition was not yet ready : and at the same time the East India Company declared that their ships could not now be spared. The Cabinet thereupon decided that the force prepared for the South Sea Expedition, which could not take place without the co-operation of East India ships and troops, should be employed in the capture of the Cape ; and if the attack failed, 2,000 of the troops were to

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Appendix VII. It is undated.

<sup>2</sup> Final Agreement signed September 30th by Lord Hillsborough for his Government and Mr. W. Devagne on behalf of the East India Company.

<sup>3</sup> Secret Instructions, September 16th and 19th, 1780.



be sent to India to assist in the operations there.<sup>1</sup> The information that the expedition to the South Seas was laid aside, and that the intention was to capture and keep possession of the Cape, was sent to Hughes and Lord Hillsborough on January 2nd, 1781.

The Commander of the troops was General Medows, an officer who had greatly distinguished himself in the operations at St. Lucia. The escort, under Commodore Johnstone, consisted of five ships and three frigates.<sup>2</sup> The troops were embarked in thirty-five transports, mostly armed.

Commodore Johnstone, as described by Charnock—who betrays, it must be said, a very marked bias against him—appears to have been of an unamiable character and to have had some singular views on technical matters. A post captain of nineteen years' standing, he had spent most of these years on shore, either as Governor of Pensacola—hence his nickname "Governor" Johnstone—or as Member for Cockermouth in Parliament, where he indulged in his darling propensity for haranguing the House on every possible occasion. In 1775 he had served as a Commissioner for treating with the American colonies; but his methods were such that Congress declined to continue any manner of intercourse with him, "especially to negotiate with him upon affairs in which the cause of liberty and virtue is interested." In 1779 he made a violent attack upon Lord Howe's management of the campaign with d'Estaing in which, says Charnock, "Those among his friends who were not seamen were astonished at his professional knowledge, and there were not wanting those who were even hardy enough to arraign the conduct and Administration because he was not invested with the chief command of the main or Channel Fleet." Shortly afterwards he was appointed

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, *Papers of King George III*, vol. v; *vide* also India Office Records, *Home Misc.*, vols. 145, 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Hero*, 74; *Monmouth*, 64; *Romney*, *Jupiter*, *Isis*, 50; *Diana and Jason*, 32; *Active*, 28.

Commodore on the Lisbon station. Such was the character and such the sea experience of the officer who was first to encounter the Bailli de Suffren.

Johnstone's squadron left Spithead with the great fleet under Admiral Darby appointed to relieve Gibraltar on March 13th, but parted company on the same night from the main body in the Channel and proceeded towards the Azores. It arrived at Porto Praya on April 11th and there it began to water and provision, a part, for greater despatch, having been dropped the day before at Isle of Maio with orders to rejoin within a specified time.

This detachment completed its watering before the remainder and re-anchored in the harbour of Porto Praya on the 15th, but in no particular order. Clearly, Johnstone had no suspicion that any enemy force could be within a dangerous distance of his squadron and convoy. Thus, oblivious of danger, his squadron was lying, with his many transports, scattered about the bay, engaged in completing his embarkation of water and cattle, on the morning of April 16th.<sup>1</sup>

Only too often in the history of British oversea expeditions their failure has been predetermined by a failure to preserve secrecy. The expedition to the Cape was no exception to the rule. Knowledge not only that a force was being prepared, but also of its probable destination reached both Paris and Amsterdam. It has been stated that this was due to the work of a French spy, one de la Mothe, who was caught, tried and executed,<sup>2</sup> and it is known that there was leakage in the Secretary's office.

Nevertheless, while definite information, however obtained, may have been the determining cause of the French Ministry's decision to send a naval force to the Cape of Good Hope,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Laird Clowes makes the positive assertion that Johnstone was aware that a French division was on his track. I find no justification for this assumption, and the fact that it was not until April 18th that the Monarca was ordered to reinforce him indicates that the Minister himself was not aware of Suffren's orders.

<sup>2</sup> Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs*, vol. v, p. 311.

it is plain that the question of sending one had been long in contemplation and was merely accelerated by the declaration of war with Holland. Since the abandonment of the policy of Choiseul in 1772 until the middle of 1780 the French Ministry had confined its efforts in the East to rendering the French islands secure. The four ships already at Mauritius<sup>1</sup> had been strengthened by the dispatch of two more,<sup>2</sup> carrying also a regiment of infantry, which, they considered, had placed the French colonies in a state of security; and that indeed was also the opinion in England and India. As the dispute with the Dutch grew more acute the probability that England might attack the Dutch colonies naturally engaged attention in France, and in the end of October the question arose in Paris of reinforcing the East Indies. De Castries<sup>3</sup> had then asked which four coppered ships of the line would be quickly available and what officers with knowledge of the Eastern Seas: adding, "il sera nécessaire que l'armement ne paroisse pas avoir une destination différente."<sup>4</sup> The news that five British ships—the South Sea Expedition—with probably 2,000 troops, were being got ready for India, reached Paris as soon as December 27th,<sup>5</sup> and the possibility that this might affect the Cape of Good Hope was suggested.<sup>6</sup> The result of the loss of the Cape upon the security of the French possessions in the Indian seas, and on the military situation there, was fully appreciated by the French Minister, who well knew that if Holland lost the Cape, the French colonies would be deprived of its help

<sup>1</sup> Orient, 74; Brillant, Sévère, 64; Flamand, 50.

<sup>2</sup> Brave and Ajax, 64. The *Protée* which sailed from Brest with the *Ajax* on February 13th was taken by a squadron under Digby on February 24th.

<sup>3</sup> The Marquis de Castries had succeeded M. de Sartine as Minister of Marine on October 12th, 1780, and at once had infused a new energy into the affairs at sea. Cf. Castex, *La Manœuvre de la Praya*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> De Castries to d'Hector (Commanding at Brest), October 28th, 1780.

<sup>5</sup> De Castries to d'Hector, December 27th, 1780. The *Courrier de l'Europe* of December 26th published the information that five ships were about to sail.

<sup>6</sup> "Cette disposition nouvelle pourroit intéresser le cap ou quelqu'autre établissement hollandaise."

and become wholly dependent upon the home country for subsistence.<sup>1</sup>

But it was even more on account of the important results that were hoped for from opening a campaign in India that the Cape became now of such pressing interest. The whole chain of causes is apparent. Although the operations in America and the American seas had given reason to hope that the North American colonies would be separated from Britain, a conclusion of the war between France and England was not to be expected therefrom. The prospects of a capture of islands in the West Indies proving a decisive blow was now remote. Where else could a blow be delivered that promised to be decisive? India and the Indian commerce were of high importance to England. The relations of Hyder Ali and of the Mahrattas with the British offered an opportunity for a comparatively small force to bring matters to a conclusion there. Nothing, however, could be effected unless Mauritius were secure and its supplies guaranteed. The Cape was the pivot upon which the supplies depended; and the Cape, hitherto available as a source of supplies, because neutral, was now exposed to being lost through Holland's becoming a belligerent.

These considerations, which run through the correspondence of de Castries with de Souillac and the Comte d'Hector make it obvious that it needed neither spy nor babbler to open the eyes of the acute French Minister to the importance of securing the Cape against British attack. Indeed, Bouvet de Lozier used words almost identical with those used by the British Commanders when he reminded Castries that the Cape was "le magasin de nos îles de France et de Bourbon, et il nous serait bien difficile de les conserver sans le secours qu'elles en tirent."<sup>2</sup>

It would, therefore, have been surprising if the French

<sup>1</sup> De Castries to d'Hector, December 21st, 1780.

<sup>2</sup> Bouvet de Lozier to de Castries, January 9th, 1781. Lacour Gayet, *La Marine sous Louis XVI*, p. 481.

Minister had taken no steps to secure the Cape to the Dutch. The first taken was the despatch of a frigate, the *Sylphide*, to carry the warning of the declaration of war with all haste to the Cape and Colombo. She reached the Cape on March 31st. The Governor took precautionary measures immediately. He detained all the homeward-bound Dutch Company's ships, discharged their cargoes, removed their guns to strengthen his defences on shore, and sent the empty ships to hide in Saldanha Bay in the hopes that they would there escape discovery and capture.<sup>1</sup> One ship was sent to warn Batavia, and another to Colombo where it arrived on June 6th—a fortnight before Hughes had the same information from Macartney outside Madras. The political council, fully alive to the fact that the importance of Trincomali would infallibly invite an English attack, and that the troops there were insufficient to hold both the forts, ordered the officer in command to withdraw everyone except invalids and superannuated men from Pagoda Hill,<sup>2</sup> and concentrate the defence at Fort Ostenburg. Until reinforcements could arrive from Europe nothing could be done but to defend, to the best of their ability, the most important points in their possessions; and no such aid could be expected at the earliest until October.<sup>3</sup>

In January, shortly after the despatch of the *Sylphide*, preparations were made in Paris to forestall the British expedition at the Cape. A body of troops was ordered to be made ready to reinforce the Dutch garrison, and the ships of the line, the need for which Castries had foretold in October, were brought forward, first to escort the troops to their destination, and then to reinforce the squadron in the East Indies; on arrival there they were to take what advantage they could of the favourable situation created

<sup>1</sup> *Colonies*, C2, 161, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Now Fort Frederick.

<sup>3</sup> *Colombo Records*, vol. D, 251 : Dagregister, Cape Records.

by Baillie's disaster, news of which had reached France by the overland route.

The secret of the destination of the French squadron was better concealed in Paris than in London. Even so late as the end of February the officer who was to command the squadron was not selected, nor are there any indications that it was then known in London that a portion of the fleet fitting out at Brest was intended for the Cape or the Indies. Nevertheless an opportunity was afforded at the last moment for its destination to leak out by the familiar method of a confidential communication: for Suffren, who was in the habit of writing freely to his cousin, Madame D'Alais, told her on March 18th that he was appointed to the command of five ships going to the East Indies. There is no reason to suppose that a word ever escaped from Madame D'Alais; but it is precisely by the channel of such confidential communications to friends, supposedly discreet, that leakage only too often occurs—a fact of which Lord Sandwich suggested we should avail ourselves to mislead the enemy as to the objects of the South Sea Expedition.<sup>1</sup> Nor was this the only means by which information might reach an enemy. The enemy spy was an available channel for attempting to mislead him. Ministers were fully aware that secrets were bought from venal clerks in the Secretary's office; and they had evidence of the existence of one in the case of La Mothe. They evidently suspected, or were aware of, the presence of another; and of him they made use by placing in his way a set of false instructions directed to Admiral Darby, Commodore Johnstone and General Medows, which were bought or stolen and were duly transmitted to the Hague in the beginning of March.

In these instructions both the object and objectives of the expedition, and the course and ports of call of the squadron, were falsified. The object was set out to be—to make a real and durable impression upon the Dutch,

<sup>1</sup> *Vids Appendices IV, VII.*

which should "injure their commerce, affect their political strength and give lustre to the British arms." The objective selected for this purpose was the Dutch possessions in the East Indies situated to the east of the Cape of Good Hope. The expedition was to undertake the conquest or destruction of all these establishments, to burn and destroy as completely as possible all the docks, storehouses and ships that could be found, and, in general, to act in the manner best calculated to distress the enemy, beginning to the westward of Malacca and going on to Java and Batavia. If these possessions were taken, they were to be held; but if it should prove impossible to hold them all the works, defences, naval stores, animals and so forth were to be completely destroyed before evacuation.

Finally to complete the misrepresentation, the instructions to the naval commanders indicated that the squadron would consist of six ships, that it would accompany Darby to Gibraltar and effect the relief of the fortress before parting company, would meet a convoy at Madeira, and would call at St. Helena; none of which was intended.

This carefully prepared set of false instructions had all the outward appearance of authenticity. The spy—one Montaigu—into whose ready hands they were allowed to fall, sent them to the Hague, and from the Hague they were sent to Paris where they arrived on March 12th. De Castries had then moved to Brest in order to be in the closest touch with de Grasse and the fleet up to the last moment, and thither they were forwarded, arriving on the 16th. The threat to the Dutch East Indies had caused a flutter at the Hague, and the new intelligence as to the force and destination caused another flutter at Brest. A copy was sent to de Souillac and d'Orves; Suffren was reinforced with a fifth ship, and he was ordered not to delay at the Cape after he had landed his reinforcement, but to proceed quickly to the Islands to join d'Orves, after which the combined eleven ships should cruise between the

Cape and India to intercept Johnstone's squadron. In spite, however, of the Cape not being the objective of the expedition, the Commanders were reminded that it must be made secure: "Sa Majesté en préfère la conservation à toute autre opération."<sup>1</sup>

The despatch, it has been said, caused some anxiety at the Hague and at Brest. But if it was intended to put the French or the Dutch off their guard at the Cape, it failed, as the last sentences above indicate. Moreover, it had the effect of making the French reinforce Suffren's squadron by one ship, which was unfortunate and (as Admiral Castex has pointed out) it gave the French an opportunity for a true military stroke. A British fleet inferior to that at Brest was about to sail encumbered with the defence of a great convoy; a tactical situation in which no Commander from Tromp onwards has ever desired to be placed. For the French, conditions could hardly be better for a fleet action. The destruction of the British fleet would effectually solve the strategical problem at sea and the results would immediately disclose themselves in India, at the Cape, in the West Indies and at Gibraltar.

On the other hand, the ingenious may amuse themselves in speculating whether it would have been possible to employ the same methods of misleading the enemy to draw him to sea in search of a supposedly inferior fleet and of a convoy that had been left in Cork, only to find himself in the face of a stronger body and forced to fight an action under conditions he did not expect or desire.

The false instructions may have been the cause of, or have contributed to, the inaction of the Dutch squadron under the East Indies. That they rendered the Dutch anxious for their valued possessions in Java and Jamaica there can be little doubt; and it is not improbable that Admiral Schryver's

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the admirable study by Lieut. (now Admiral) Castex's *La Manœuvre de la Praya* for the above details of the contents of the false instructions and their effect at Brest.



resolute clinging to his anchors at Batavia was connected with the fear of an attack which these instructions induced.<sup>1</sup>

On March 22nd a great fleet, comprising twenty-five ships of the line and over one hundred transports and store ships, sailed with an easterly wind from Brest; and of this fleet, five of the line and eight transports formed the division for the Cape and the East Indies.<sup>2</sup> The remainder, under the Comte de Grasse, were bound to the West Indies and North America.

The question naturally arises, how came it about that a fleet of this size should be able to sail, after several days of light easterly winds in which a close watch upon Brest was practicable without any difficulty, unhindered by the British fleet? In the preceding wars it had been a cardinal principle of British strategy to maintain a strong squadron to the Westward which should intercept and give battle to the enemy if he put to sea. In that position, and by that military predominance in a vital area, this force gave direct protection to the Kingdom, and to the main mass of the trade in its approaches, and cover to the many scattered positions and squadrons abroad against any descent by a greatly superior force. This had been done when the country was engaged in war with France and Spain, when numerically the British fleet was approximately the equal of those two Powers. In this war the balance was more adverse. A navy whose repairs had been starved by Lord North had not to meet France only, but also Spain and Holland. Further, the perennial difficulty of manning the fleet, ever a factor of supreme importance, was increased by the loss of the seamen of the American Colonies who now

<sup>1</sup> See post, p. 322. The rumour that an expedition was going to attack Mauritius in 1760 had a similar effect upon the French squadron there. Cf. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War*, vol. ii, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Héros* (flag), and *Annibal*, 74; *Artésien*, *Vengeur*, *Sphinx*, 64; *Fortune*, 18. All, except *Annibal* and *Fortune*, were coppered.

swelled the numbers against us.<sup>1</sup> Still, the numbers were not so unequal as to render the strategy of Anson and Hawke impracticable. Yet no attempt was made to keep the enemy under observation in his principal ports, or to meet his squadrons on their way to the oversea theatres. D'Estaing, Vaudreuil and others sailed without opposition. It was not that the actual number of ships on paper was inadequate. It was that under Lord North's government the ships had been allowed to fall into decay because money to repair them was not provided, on the score of economy, and while their names remained on the lists of ships, they were names only. They were not repaired; nor, in spite of the experience of two wars, had steps been taken to improve the administration of manning. Thus, it had been brought about that in 1778, with France only as an opponent, Keppel met d'Orvilliers with a bare equality instead of the crushing superiority that should have been possible. The great and fundamental idea, too, of a constantly superior Western squadron had gone, urged though it was by Keppel and Howe. The Admiralty Board, of whom one only was at that time a seaman, deserted the old policy of concentrating every effort upon the enemy squadron. The preparations in Brest, where de Grasse was assembled with twenty-five of the line and his fleet of over 100 transports, were quite well known in London; nor could there be any doubt as to the destination of at least the major portion of this force. Yet although this force was preparing, Darby with a superior fleet of thirty of the line was sent to Cork a bare week before the sailing of de Grasse. The reason for this was the assumed need for the immediate relief of

<sup>1</sup> The Fleets :

	British.	French.	Spanish.	Dutch.	Total.
64 guns and over .	112	62	57	7	124
60 and 50 guns .	25	6	4	15	25

From these numbers deductions must be made for ships unfit for sea.

What the loss of seamen was is not certain. The estimate given earlier puts it at 1,800 men.

Gibraltar, Cork being the port from which provisions were to be furnished.

The official defence for this conduct of the strategy was that the relief of Gibraltar was "looked for by the whole nation," or, in other words, some success was needed for political purposes. The Government, in its defence, said that it was expected that the Spanish fleet in the Straits would give battle, hence the supply of ships must have protection from a fleet at least equal to that of Spain. Would it be prudent, they asked, to risk the loss of Gibraltar for the bare chance of meeting de Grasse? It had been suggested that frigates could have been kept off Brest, but of what use, asked Lord Mulgrave to whom the duty of official defence fell,<sup>1</sup> would these be without a squadron? They would merely be driven off and the intelligence of the sailing of the enemy would never be received.

The answer to this was that the relief was not the pressing necessity it was represented to be. In General Conway's opinion, in any case, it should have been considered as secondary to defeating de Grasse's fleet<sup>2</sup>; for by intercepting him the West Indies would be saved. The excuse that there would have been but a bare chance of meeting the French was wholly invalid. Previous experience had shown that a fleet could hold this station, even in winter weather; and on this occasion the fleet had sailed in almost a dead calm with its mass of transports; and of that fleet the *Ville de Paris* was so bad a sailer that she had actually left harbour in tow. The opportunity for an unencumbered and superior fleet like Darby's to act against the expedition was almost unlimited. According to Howe, it was perfectly feasible to cruise off Brest at that time. Moreover, if the relief of Gibraltar were so urgent why, it was asked, had it not been undertaken sooner, as it could have been? If,

<sup>1</sup> For the debate, see *Parliamentary History*, vol. xxxii, "Debate on the want of success by the British Navy," January 24th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*, vol. xxii, p. 537.

on the other hand, it had suddenly become urgent wholly unexpectedly, and Darby was therefore obliged to go with the transports to Gibraltar Bay, frigates should have been left off Brest. Howe, in replying to Lord Mulgrave's reference to frigates, disagreed that they would be of no value, for they were sometimes to be used with safety, even thus detached. It was true that information of the sailing of the fleet could be got with greater certainty and rapidity over land,<sup>1</sup> but frigates were necessary to follow the quarry and discover his destination; and this information they could have carried to Darby, at Gibraltar, who could then have proceeded without delay in pursuit. But with proper steps this would not have become necessary. If any reasonable degree of foresight had been exercised, Darby could have sailed earlier, and would have been back cruising off Brest in time; and there he would have remained. To expose the West Indies, as they had been exposed, was, in Howe's view, a gross mismanagement of the strategy. Nothing should have been allowed to deflect the fleet from the purpose of giving battle to the main French fleet.

That deflection was the main cause for the failure of the attempt to capture the Cape, and, in all probability, for the hard fought struggle which took place in the Indian Seas under the direction of one of the finest fighting sea-commanders in history, and that so gravely threatened British dominion in India. The episode furnishes one of the clearest examples of the truth of the saying that the foundation of the defence of the oversea Dominions rests, primarily, upon the use made of the main concentration. "Not only the fate of the West Indies, but the whole fortune of the war, might have been decided, almost without a risk, in the Bay of Biscay."<sup>2</sup> So said that great seaman,

<sup>1</sup> I have not seen this opinion expressed elsewhere at that time. It indicates that a close watch was kept on shore by an organised service of intelligence.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Register*, 1782, pp. 164, 165.

Lord Howe. How far-reaching were the effects of a contrary policy upon our dominion in India was soon to be shown.

The great fighter who commanded the French detachment for the East Indies was the Bailli de Suffren. Cadet of an old family of Provence, Suffren was now just under fifty-two years old. His experience at sea had begun at the age of fourteen. In the following year he was present in the *Solide* at the indecisive battle of Toulon. He was taken prisoner in the *Monarque*, in Hawke's battle with de l'Etandière in 1747. He was with de la Galissonnière at the capture of Minorca and the engagement with Byng, and with de la Clue at Lagos in 1759, when he was taken prisoner a second time. In the years since the Peace of Paris he had taken part in operations against the Barbary forces ; and he had served in the evolutionary squadron of 1776. Before war broke out in 1778 he went with D'Estaing to the North American Station and subsequently took part in the battle with Byron off Grenada. This campaign had confirmed him in his opinion that whatever the object of a combined campaign, the destruction of the opposing fleet is the principal object in the operations at sea. To this opinion, in spite of the prevailing view to the contrary then held by so many of his compatriots, he adhered, on it he acted, and to it his success, so far as he owed it to strategy, is to be ascribed. His tactical doctrine was to create the utmost degree of superiority at the point at which he desired to produce his decision. To this end he concentrated as much force as possible to deliver the blow ; he distributed containing forces to occupy the enemy's attention elsewhere ; and he employed offensive tactics even when in inferior force, as being the only means of overcoming the disability of weakness ; and if he did not put this into execution throughout, it was because his officers were inadequate to their task. He hated dogma and preconceived diagrammatical formations and movements. The schematic

and mathematical conceptions of Père Hoste he held in contempt. His own ample experience he supplemented by the experience of others ; he had studied all Ruyter's campaigns, and had a close and detailed knowledge of those fought by Labourdonnais and d'Aché in the theatre in which he was about to fight.<sup>1</sup> His personal energy was prodigious. His spirit conquered the disability of his body, and he never allowed the burden of great obesity to diminish the activity of either his mind or his body. Hickey, who met him in Trincomali in 1781, gives a lively portrait of his appearance. " In height he was about five feet five inches, very corpulent, although quite grey he wore neither powder nor pomatun, nor any curl, having a short cue (*sic*) of three or four inches tied with a piece of old spun-yarn. He was in slippers, or rather, a pair of old shoes, the straps being cut off, blue cloth breeches unbuttoned at the knees, cotton or thread stockings (none of the cleanest) hanging about his legs, no waistcoat or cravat, a coarse linen shirt entirely wet with perspiration, open at the neck, the sleeves being rolled up above his elbows. . . . I afterwards ascertained that he always appeared as above described during the morning." <sup>a</sup> For all his little attention to personal appearance or the artificial punctilio of parades, this great seaman was the soul of courtesy. He possessed that natural authority which dispenses with, since it never feels the need of, the external signs by which power and authority are impressed in ordinary life ; for in him authority was inborn. Las Cases, who had known Suffren at this time, says he had genius, ardour, great ambition, an iron character ; was very egotistical, a bad comrade, liked by none but admired and appreciated by all ; a man with whom one could not live, difficult to command, not prone to obedience, very prone to criticise. In this picture we can trace many of the qualities of the great individualistic seamen and

<sup>1</sup> Castex, *Les Idées militaires de la Marine du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*.

<sup>a</sup> *Memoirs of William Hickey*, vol. iii, p. 51.

commanders—Vernon, Hood, Dundonald, Nelson. There are the fiery nature, the quick genius which resents the slow-acting mind and takes offence at stupidity, the self-reliance which is often accompanied by impatience of control, but which makes responsibility sit lightly upon the possessor's shoulders. There is little wonder that Napoleon, thinking of the failure of his own several naval schemes, exclaimed, "Oh, why did he not live until my time, or why have I been unable to find a man of his stamp! I would have made him our Nelson and affairs would have taken a different course."

The force which this ardent Provençal was taking to the Cape consisted of five ships of the line, of which four were coppered—a provision to which Suffren with his genius for strategical and tactical manoeuvre invariably attached great importance—and a frigate.<sup>1</sup> Eight merchant ships carrying 1,100 men of the Regiments of Austrasie and Pondicherry and 100 artillerymen, with a good supply of munitions and stores, formed his convoy. This squadron, as we have seen, was attached to the great fleet under de Grasse which was bound to the West Indies.

On March 22nd, saluted by the cheers of the populace and the roar of guns, the fleet of 130 sail left Brest. The fleet was to remain in company until it reached Madeira in order, as de Grasse's instructions ran, to keep the English in suspense as to where the principal effort was to be made, and "to ensure, by this uncertainty, a sufficient superiority in America and Asia to decide the success of the revolutions which should procure the independence of those two great countries."<sup>2</sup> On arrival off Cape Roca on March 29th Suffren's division parted company. Although he knew that the British squadron was ahead of him, Suffren had no suspicion how near it was when, as Johnstone had done and for similar reasons, he decided on April 15th to put

<sup>1</sup> Héros, Annibal, 74 ; Vengeur, Artésien, Sphinx, 64 ; Fortune, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives de la Marine*, B 4, 197, p. 275.

into Santiago de Porto Praya to water and make some minor repairs. Chance, as it has often done in war, threw the two squadrons together. On approaching the harbour at daylight on April 16th the Artésien, scouting ahead, sighted several ships at anchor; by a quarter to nine she was able to report them as enemies. Suffren, quickly appreciating the opportunity offered to him, promptly decided to attack. His mission was to save the Cape. Here, in inferior force, lying in an exposed position, was that which endangered it. True, the exposed position was in a neutral port, and his orders were to lose no time in reaching the Cape. In justification of his disregard of neutrality and of his orders,<sup>1</sup> he said that he knew he might possibly be blamed by the Council of State for his violation of neutral territory. With both humour and honesty he said that there were several ways open to him by which he might defend his conduct. He might say that the English had fired first; or he might argue that La Praya, from the very meaning of the word, was merely an open beach, with only one wretched fort, and no "port" in the true sense of the term; or he might recall his own capture at Lagos by Boscawen's fleet, under the very muzzles of the Portuguese guns; or he might refer to his instructions which directed him to attack the English everywhere<sup>2</sup>—"But I will admit to you, Monseigneur," he ended, "that I went in to attack them of deliberate intention, hoping that in favour of surprise and of the disorder in which they were anchored, I should destroy them; that I should bring M. d'Orves a reinforcement upon which he had not counted; and that finally, with superiority established in India, peace would result." The candour of this is as refreshing as the sense is sound; and with Boscawen to our account, the

<sup>1</sup> De Castries, when the news reached him, wished to know why he had turned aside from his principal object—that is reaching the Cape before Johnstone.—De Castries to Suffren, July 1st, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to de Castries, August 10th, 1781. *A.M.*, B 4, 198.



English are in no position to throw stones on the legal issue.<sup>1</sup>

His ships were strung out in loose order, and he formed a line of battle as far as he was able ; but only three of his ships were closed up. Then, without giving any particular instructions to his captains as to the form of attack, he sailed into the Bay. He relied on his captains to act upon their own initiative in the most effective manner.

The advantage of surprise is an axiom ; but surprise should be confined to the enemy. In this case some of his own people were equally taken unprepared, for the captain of the *Annibal*, not suspecting that an attack in a neutral harbour was intended, neither cleared his decks, which were lumbered with casks got up for a watering, nor cast loose his guns ; while other captains had no idea as to what enemy they should select nor how they should proceed. Even Suffren had still to learn the need for informing his subordinates.

When Johnstone saw the French squadron making for the harbour he beat to quarters and cleared for action. His ships were still engaged in watering, and casks and live stock were mingled in disorder on their decks. The squadron was caught at a marked disadvantage. It was weak, for although the armed transports mounted a number of guns in the aggregate, not many of them could contribute an effective fire, and individually the ships were of little account to 74- or 64-gun ships, with their heavier ordnance and thicker scantling. The squadron itself, anchored in a loose formation instead of the regular form which experience had proved effective, offered a favourable objective to the superior enemy who added to his other advantages the possession of the initiative.

<sup>1</sup> The French Ministry were nevertheless uneasy about the breach of neutrality; writing to Suffren concerning the misconduct he had reported on the part of the *Vengeur* and *Sphinx*, they said the King would order a court-martial, "*Si les circonstances politiques ne faisaient craindre de rendre public un acte contraire au droit de gens envers la Cour de Portugal.*"—De Castries to Suffren, November 24th, 1781, B 4, 197.

With all these advantages, even allowing for the fire which about a dozen of the armed transports could contribute to the action,<sup>1</sup> the attack was a tactical failure. Suffren himself led in boldly, the *Annibal* came close astern of him, the *Artésien* followed a little to leeward, the *Vengeur* and *Sphinx* some way astern. Steering for the British flagship the French Commander passed by the *Isis*, *Monmouth* and *Jupiter*, receiving their fire as he did so, and dropped his anchor between the *Hero* and the *Monmouth*; but his ship not bringing up to her anchor, she drove down close alongside the *Hero*. Thus, a duel developed between the two 74's. The *Annibal* anchored to windward of the *Héros* and there received the fire, not only of the *Jupiter* and *Monmouth* but also a harassing fire from the guns and musketry of the transports; and, as we have seen, her Captain not having expected Suffren to attack in a neutral harbour, he had not cleared for action and could not reply effectively.

So far such concentration as had been effected was on the side of the British, nor was it redressed by the action of the succeeding French ships. The *Artésien* fell on board the Company ships *Fortitude* and *Hinchinbrook*, but she captured neither, nor performed any service of value. Still less did the *Vengeur* and *Sphinx*, which, arriving later, gave no support to either of the closely engaged and hard-pressed *Héros* and *Annibal*, but fired ineffectually at, or attempted unsuccessfully to board, the transports, inflicting some injury but none that contributed to victory.

After an hour's action the *Héros*, badly mauled and with twenty-three killed and sixty-seven wounded, cut her cable and stood to sea. The *Annibal*, with her main and foremasts gone and seventy killed and some 130 wounded, managed to struggle out of the harbour, driving mastless

<sup>1</sup> Johnstone's force, escort and transports, mounted about 600 guns, or 244 (*vide* Charnock) more than the enemy. Strength, however, is not measurable only by adding up quantities. What matters is whether it can all be brought into action when and where it is wanted. An undue importance is often attached to the armed merchant ship from failure to recognise this simple fact.

before a freshened breeze which carried her to sea. The losses in the other French ships were negligible. On the other hand, the British losses in men were extraordinarily light and occurred principally among the transports and Indiamen.<sup>1</sup>

There is little doubt that with the disabled condition of the *Annibal* and the losses sustained by the *Héros* a strong possibility existed of a successful counter-attack. None of the British ships were seriously injured, though the *Isis* had sustained a good deal of damage aloft. In the good working breeze the two ships of the line and three 50-gun ships were capable of inflicting at least a serious loss on the *Héros* and the remaining three 64's. Johnstone realised this and ordered the squadron to sea to attack the enemy. But it was not for over two hours, delayed, according to his account, by the injury aloft suffered by the *Isis*, but also by his calling a council of war, that he got out of harbour. The French squadron was then not more than a couple of miles to leeward, going before a light wind in line abreast with the *Annibal* in tow. The British squadron stood towards them in line abreast, but the *Monmouth* and the *Isis* dropping astern—the latter because of her damage aloft—Johnstone did not approach them nearer, though Suffren brought to. He considered the enemy too strong to attack except with the whole British force and sunset fell with the British squadron still astern of the French. Then Johnstone gave up the pursuit. His reason for doing so, he said, was that "I must have left my convoy in distress, and separate from the troops, without any fixed determina-

	Killed.	Wounded.
<sup>1</sup> French squadron . . .	105	223 (a)
British squadron . . .	9	47
British transports, etc. . .	27	83
	36	130 (b)

(a) As calculated by M.Castex. (b) According to Laird Clowes, after Schomburg, vol. iv.

The figures for the British losses in Johnstone's despatch are obviously incomplete. Twenty prisoners were taken from one of the British transports.

tion concerning them or their destination. I must also have relinquished the object of the present expedition ; for these and other reasons I determined to return to Porto Praya."

Johnstone's decision was singularly unfortunate. His "other reasons" for abandoning pursuit were equally bad. The squadron had been forced, by the pursuit on the current to leeward of the island ; the sun had set ; the sea had got up ; he could not hope for a decisive action at night. If he pursued till dawn he left the transports exposed and without any instruction for rendezvous, owing to the north-east wind and south-west current, would not be able to rejoin them after an engagement such as must be expected. He realised that if he did not pursue and fight them the enemy might arrive at the Cape first and that this would be equally fatal to the expedition. He vainly tried to find compensation in a vague hope that the damaged enemy ships might be sent to the West Indies for repair, whereby they would be left inferior, or might have to go to Brazil for water. His reasoning is pitiful to read. It is the reasoning of an undecided man. If he supposed the Cape to be the destination of the French squadron, no opportunity more favourable for frustrating its designs than that offered could be hoped for. While his own squadron was little injured, one French ship was reduced to an unmanageable hulk, and he had reason to believe the *Héros* had suffered severely. To postpone action was to give the enemy time to restore the superiority of their squadron, and if he should subsequently meet the French at sea, he must then fight them under the disadvantage of having a convoy to defend, whereas now his convoy was in harbour, well to windward, and, for the time, absolutely secure from attack. On the principle of being prepared for the unexpected he would be justified in considering the degree of probability of another enemy being in those seas and finding his convoy while he was separated ; but if there is one sound rule in

such cases it is that it is better to deal with the danger that is certain than to abandon it in favour of a danger that is, at the best, problematical. Precaution, as shown earlier, is proper ; but when it is carried to the extent of throwing away the bone for the shadow it is wrong.

If, on the other hand, Johnstone was doubtful as to whither the enemy's squadron was bound, he was equally under an obligation to follow it, always assuming that we suppose, from his action in putting to sea at all, that he considered himself equal to engaging it successfully. Its destination could only be either the Cape or elsewhere. It had not come to sea without an object, and whatever that object, its attainment could best be prevented by the destruction of the squadron. At some part of the world injury would be done, and, if the destination were unknown, it was at least as possible that it might affect that part to which his own expedition was going as elsewhere. No rule is more salutary than that which lays down that the enemy in sight is the one thing upon which to concentrate every effort. Hardly anything in sea warfare leads to more difficulty, confusion and waste of effort than an unlocated enemy fleet. When the enemy is located it is the duty of the Commander to take the fullest possible advantage of the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Suffren's decision to attack, and the promptitude with which it was made, are justly to be praised ; but the lack of order, the omission to have prepared his subordinates to act, cannot be defended. For the omission, it may well be allowed that Suffren had had no opportunity of consulting his Captains and instructing them in what he wished

<sup>1</sup> In justice to Johnstone, the following, written by one who came out in the squadron, should be added : " After the French ships got out of harbour, it was considered in a Council of War whether it would be proper to pursue and engage them : but General Medows objecting strongly to this, as the time before they could return to St. Jago again to rejoin the Indiamen and transports (which was unavoidable) and any misfortune happening to any of their ships, rendered the pursuit hazardous and it was therefore laid aside" (*Supplement to Bengal Gazette*, September 15th, 1781). Yet in spite of the decision the pursuit was begun. In breaking it off Johnstone may have been influenced by the decision.

to do ; and that the meeting was unexpected. But this defence on the plea of the unexpected may also be used to justify the disordered manner in which Johnstone's squadron was anchored. Both Commanders were, in fact, taken by surprise, and the comment that suggests itself is the old one, that provided it does not prejudice success no care is excessive to guard against the chances of war. Chance only too often throws antagonists together. Vigilance can never be relaxed, nor precautions omitted or measures left unmade, to deal with the enemy at any moment if he should appear. How unexpectedly meetings occur was illustrated on more than one occasion in the recent war. When Admiral Sturdee anchored at the Falkland Islands he fully believed Von Spee to be on the west coast of America. Von Spee, on his hand, had no idea of the presence of Sturdee in Port Stanley. When the Emden ran into the Cocos Islands she had no suspicion whatever that a superior British force was passing within about two hours' steaming. Neither the English nor the German Commanders on either side had reason to expect an enemy ; yet the enemy was there. It may be mere trite repetition of a platitude to say that a Commander should be ready for the unexpected, but that it needs constant repetition is demonstrated by the whole experience of unpreparedness in war, of which we have this example of two experienced men both unprepared for the situation that suddenly burst upon them at Porto Praya. Nelson's doctrine that the order of sailing should be the order of battle is a dictum of constant preparedness. To have suggested to Suffren at daylight on the 16th that he would do well to close up his ships in line of battle would probably have seemed at the moment a very superfluous suggestion. Yet if his ships had been closed, and he could have conveyed his intentions to his Captains, so that if an enemy appeared in any direction, north, south, east or west, he and his Captains would have been able to act effectively and without delay, Johnstone's

squadron might have been destroyed. True, he saved the Cape. But the destruction of Johnstone's force would have done more than save the Cape. Medows's valuable reinforcement would never have reached India, and the Hero, Monmouth and Isis might never have appeared in the British line on February 17th in 1782; possibly, even, some of them might have worn the fleur-de-lys. Hughes's struggle on that day with nine ships against twelve was sufficiently severe. Can there be much dispute as to what the result would have been if he had had but six ships to oppose twelve, or even more? <sup>1</sup>

Although he had not destroyed the British expedition, Suffren felt assured that he had destroyed their chances of taking the Cape. The Annibal was badly damaged, but trusting to be able to remast her at the Cape he took her in tow, repairing so much of her damage as the shipwrights of the squadron could tackle during the voyage. He anchored in False Bay on June 20th, and the troops were landed—a welcome reinforcement, for the garrison numbered no more than 400 regular troops. There is little doubt that if Johnstone had arrived first, his force of 3,000 regular troops was fully adequate to overcome this defence and attain the object of the expedition.

Johnstone showed none of the energy of Suffren. Though his ships were but little injured aloft he did not leave Porto Praya for a full fortnight after the engagement. On the voyage a Dutch East Indiaman was taken from which it was learned that Suffren had reached the Cape, and that some homeward-bound Dutch ships lay hidden in Saldanha Bay, an undefended harbour about forty miles from Simon's Bay. These he decided to seize and, sailing into the Bay on June 21st, he took four of them and burned the fifth. But although Suffren's squadron still lay in False Bay,

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the Porto Praya campaign, see Castex, *La Manœuvre de la Praya*. Hickey gives what he represents as Suffren's own description in his *Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. 56 *et seq.*

Johnstone made no effort to bring it to action, nor even to ascertain where it lay or its condition. The *Annibal* was still without masts and incapable of movement, and, if he had been, as he had supposed himself, capable of renewing the action outside Porto Praya, he was not less capable of fighting Suffren now. Certainly the French squadron might have drawn itself under the protection of batteries; but whether attack would be possible could only be determined by going to see. This he did not do. Content with his four prizes he detached the transports and Indiamen under the escort of five ships<sup>1</sup> under the orders of Captain Alms, to proceed to India, and himself returned with his prizes to St. Helena.

Johnstone's conduct can hardly be too strongly condemned. If every allowance is made for his failing to foresee the possibility of being attacked in Porto Praya, and his consequent mode of anchoring his squadron, there can be none for his failure to pursue after Suffren's withdrawal with his wounded *Annibal*; none for remaining a fortnight in harbour; none for making no attempt to get into touch once more with Suffren, or to discover the condition of his ships. Though he cannot have failed to have learned, after his capture of the Dutch ships, that Suffren was in False Bay, he detached his thirty transports with a diminished escort; an escort which would have made them as easy a prize to the French squadron as the East and West India convoy, detached from its Channel fleet escort off Finisterre, fell a victim to Cordova's fleet in August 1780. Finally, to complete the tale of his mishandling, when, on arrival at St. Helena, he met the *Hannibal*, 50, on her way to the East Indies, he directed her to cruise for twelve or fourteen days off the Cape, and again for the same time off Mauritius. "This," as Hughes caustically remarked, "the Commodore is pleased in his orders to Captain Christie to term *expeditiously joining the squadron in the East Indies*."

<sup>1</sup> *Hero*, *Monmouth*, *Isis*, *Active*, *San Carlos*.



These highly improper orders had an unfortunate ending. The Hannibal met a French convoy off the Cape and took two ships, with which she returned to St. Helena, and eventually resumed her outward voyage fifty-eight days after her originally intended departure from the island. On her passage she fell in with Suffren's squadron and was taken. All the public despatches on board her fell into Suffren's hands and these put him in full possession of the situation in India as well as a 50-gun ship.

Hence it occurred that when the admirals met in their first engagement off Madras, the disparity was twelve to nine instead of eleven to ten.

Thus the British expedition, aimed at disabling French sea power in India, failed. A false direction of the strategy in the Bay of Biscay, lack of secrecy, omission to furnish a covering force, lack of precautions on the voyage, disregard of the principle of fighting the enemy wherever he could be found: these were the principal causes of the failure. Liberties were lightly taken both by those who devised and by him who conducted the expedition; and M. de Suffren was not a man with whom liberties could be taken. The curtain came down on the second act of the drama of his command on October 25th, 1781, when the *chef d'escadre* arrived from Europe with his reinforcement and anchored in Port Louis. His arrival brought the French naval forces in the east up to ten ships of the line, a 50-gun ship and nine other vessels, frigates and sloops. To oppose these at this time, Hughes had no more than six of the line and five smaller vessels. Fortunately for the British in India the French squadron could not proceed at once to the Coromandel coast, nor would the season be favourable for operations for over another two months; and we must now examine the operations which had taken place in India since June 1781, when the news of the same cause that had prompted the despatch of Johnstone's and Suffren's squadrons had reached Hughes in Madras Roads.

## EFFECTS OF THE DUTCH ENTRY INTO THE WAR 153

FRENCH SQUADRON AND MYSOREAN NAVY<sup>1</sup>

FRENCH SQUADRON.		MYSOREAN NAVY.		
Ships.	Guns.	Port.	No. of Ships.	Guns.
Orient . . . . .	74	Mirjee . . . . .	2	20
Héros . . . . .	74	Onore . . . . .	1	60
Annibal . . . . .	74	" . . . . .	1	36
Brillant . . . . .	64	Candapore . . . . .	1	60
Vengeur . . . . .	64	" . . . . .	1	36
Sphinx . . . . .	64	Beypore <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	1	24
Artésien . . . . .	64	" . . . . .	1	12
Bizarre . . . . .	64	" . . . . .	1	20
Sévère . . . . .	64	Mangalore . . . . .	1 <sup>2</sup>	64
Ajax . . . . .	64	" . . . . .	1	36
Flamand . . . . .	50	" . . . . .	3 grabs	24
Hannibal (late British)	50	" . . . . .	2 snows <sup>3</sup>	12
Pourvoyeuse . . . . .	40	" . . . . .	2 snows	18
Consolante . . . . .	40	" . . . . .	5 ketches	12
Fine . . . . .	36	" . . . . .	13 gallivats	4
Bellone . . . . .	36			
Subtile . . . . .	26			
Fortune . . . . .	18			
Sylphide . . . . .	14			
Argus . . . . .	12			
Diligent . . . . .	10			
Pulveriseur f.s. . . . .	8			

<sup>1</sup> Building.<sup>2</sup> Mounting 24 Prs. Below, 18 Prs. alone.<sup>3</sup> Very fast.<sup>1</sup> In the Indian Seas, January 1782.

## BRITISH SQUADRON AND BOMBAY MARINE.

BRITISH SQUADRON.				BOMBAY MARINE.		
Ships.	Guns.	Ships.	Guns.	—	No. of Ships.	Guns.
Superb . . . . .	74	Sultan . . . . .	74	"Capital" Cruisers	2	24
Monarca . . . . .	68	Active . . . . .	32	2nd-rate Cruisers	3	14
Exeter . . . . .	64	Coventry . . . . .	28	Small Cruiser . . . . .	1	8
Eagle . . . . .	64	Chaser . . . . .	18	Gallivats . . . . .	12	8-5
Burford . . . . .	64	Seahorse . . . . .	24	Cutters . . . . .	2	—
Worcester . . . . .	64	Nymph . . . . .	14	Bombs . . . . .	2	—
Magnanime <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	64			Schooners . . . . .	2	—

Did not join until March.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CAPTURE OF NEGAPATAM AND TRINCOMALI

WE left Hughes in the beginning of July 1781, taking a position to windward of Negapatam with the principal object of "attacking the enemy's coming on the coast" and the secondary one of blocking up Negapatam; and Coote at Cuddalore, having inflicted a serious, but not a decisive, defeat upon Hyder at Porto Novo. Lord Macartney, the new Governor of Madras, had arrived, bringing instructions to the Company from the Secret Committee in London that they should attack the Dutch settlements, islands and possessions in India, and to Hughes similar instructions from Lord Weymouth.

These instructions were framed in December 1780. The situation in India, so far as it was then known to the Committee in London, was that of the earlier part of that year. Thus the Committee knew that Hyder had entered the Carnatic, and that the Company was fully engaged in the Mahratta war; but they did not know that a strong French squadron was about to go to India. It was therefore necessary that these instructions should be interpreted by the Governor and the Admiral in relation to the existing situation, modified as it was by this important new factor, the French squadron.

The despatch rendered a reconsideration of policy necessary. This reconsideration included three general propositions: making our efforts against the European Powers, principally the Dutch; concentrating on driving Hyder's army out of the Carnatic; and striking at the enemy's power at sea and strengthening our own. The protagonists of the three views were, respectively, the Governor of Madras, the General

and the Admiral. The discussions took part in two phases. The first in July, shortly after Macartney's arrival; the second in September and October, when the conditions were slightly altered.

Macartney, on his arrival, found a general atmosphere of despondency in Madras, for which there was ample reason. There was a grievous shortage of provisions, for Hyder's troops, swarming over the country even up to the very outskirts of the city, had seized or destroyed all the crops. Not only was the population of the city thereby deprived of food from its normal sources, but the demand was itself greater owing to the folk of the countryside, fleeing before the marauding Mysoreans, having filled the town and increased the number of mouths to be fed. Large imports had therefore become necessary from Bengal, but these imports had been seriously interrupted at the very moment of their height—between January and May—by the action of two French privateers which cruised off the mouth of the Ganges. Hughes, with his squadron, was at that time on the other side of India, and the shortage of small frigates and corvettes from which he suffered had prevented him from furnishing an adequate defence to the rice trade. It should have been the province of the Company to assist in the defence of their own interests against this minor form of attack; but though there were Company vessels which could have been sufficiently armed, European seamen to man them were not obtainable<sup>1</sup> except at the cost of depriving the Company's trading ships of their crews; and this the Company would not do. It was not until May, when Hughes returned to the coast, that he was able to send two from his exiguous force of four frigates and sloops, to rid the bay of these pests. "The want of frigates and sloops of war to co-operate with the squadron subjected us to that inconvenience."<sup>2</sup> To add to the difficulty of supply,

<sup>1</sup> Warren Hastings to Hughes, January 22nd, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes to Hastings, May 28th, 1781.

the Dutch at once—and naturally—made a treaty with Hyder, whose troops reinforced their garrisons; while, from Sadras and Pulicat, ports northward and southward of Madras, they contributed, though not with any marked energy, towards interrupting the sea-borne supplies, and their ports served as valuable entries of supplies to Hyder, who had no seaports himself on the Coromandel coast.

Macartney's view of the new situation was that the principal object of the British should now be the capture of the Dutch possessions, in particular Ceylon; and that, to that end, all efforts should be concentrated upon crushing the Dutch. To do this required freedom from attack by Hyder, and therefore he proposed that an attempt should be made to procure peace. That peace with Hyder was eminently necessary was equally plain to Hughes and Coote; and they concurred in the despatch of a letter, drafted by the Governor, proposing to bring the war to an end. Hyder, however, had other views; for he saw in the situation the certain prospect of the downfall of British power, now being attacked simultaneously in the Mahratta country, in Bengal, in the Carnatic, and at sea—and probably also on land—by the French and the Dutch. In an evasive reply he gave as his reason for declining that he could repose no trust in the Company's word or the continuity of its policy: "The Governors and Sirdars who enter into treaties," he replied, "return to Europe after one or two years, and their acts and deeds become of no effect; and fresh Governors and Sirdars introduce new conversations." Nor is it possible to say that this was not without justification.

This reply, which destroyed any hope of freeing our hands, as Macartney had desired, to act against the Dutch, was received during July. In the meantime the smaller Dutch settlements—Sadras, Pulicat, Madapollam, Juggernaut-patam and Bimlipotam—were quickly taken; but the more important defended places, Negapatam and Trincomali, needed stronger forces for their capture than the small

bodies of militia which had sufficed to capture these lesser settlements.

The view taken by Hughes was that the first thing to do was to lay a secure foundation for command at sea. Command would require secure bases and positions. With this as his object he proposed, at two separate meetings in June at which Generals Coote and Munro were present, the capture of Negapatam and Trincomali. He wished to take Negapatam, which was very weakly defended, immediately, and to follow up this capture as soon as possible with that of Trincomali. Munro agreed, for though the Admiral's proposal was based primarily on the need of securing sea-command, it related also to the immediate military situation on land. Negapatam was a supply port for Hyder's forces in Tanjore, where the Madras Southern Army under Colonel Brathwaite was holding the country with difficulty. If the supplies, particularly of munitions and clothing, which reached Hyder through the Dutch port could be cut off, the Mysorean troops would be appreciably hampered ; and if this should render their retreat necessary, as Hughes expected it would, food from Tanjore would be able to come down to Negapatam, whence it could be conveyed by sea without difficulty to relieve the terrible distress at Madras. Further, if Negapatam remained in the hands of the Dutch it would be an invaluable asset to the French squadron. It would give the ships a secure anchorage, a source of supplies of food and a fair watering-place ; the Dutch reserves of munitions would be available, and a secure landing would exist, for the French troops if they should choose to make their effort in Tanjore. Whether the military campaign on land which aimed at the retention of the Tanjore country, or the basic naval campaign on which everything depended, were considered, Negapatam was, in Hughes's view, the point at which the squadron and army could make its most rapid and effective stroke at the moment.

Trincomali was even more important. It is the only harbour on the western shores of the Bay of Bengal which gives shelter throughout the year. As the North-East monsoon sets in on the Coromandel in about mid-October, often with a violent gale, shipping in the open roadsteads of the Coromandel coast, lying on the lee shore, is in constant danger until January,<sup>1</sup> and the possession of a secure port, from whence station off Ceylon could immediately be resumed when the violence of the monsoon was over, was a strategical advantage of the highest importance. Hughes, as his letters consistently show, held that command at sea was the factor which dominated the whole military situation. Negapatam and Trincomali were, in his words, "places of the utmost importance to the national interests and the preservation of the Company's possessions on the Coromandel coast."

Desirable, however, as the immediate capture of Negapatam clearly was from the maritime point of view, Coote considered that no detachment from the main army could then be afforded to undertake it; for that army was already too small for the work it had to do in holding the essential possessions of the Company, with a precarious supply of food. The proposal was therefore dropped in July, and Coote desired to employ the main body of his army in relieving the garrison of Wandewash, then invested by Hyder and Tippoo, and in assuring the safe arrival of a reinforcement from Bengal under Colonel Pearse, numbering about 4,000 men, which, after many months, was at last approaching the Presidency.<sup>2</sup> With these objects, Coote, as soon as possible after the battle of Porto Novo, marched on Wandewash, relieved the garrison on July 18th, and moved north to

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Watson's instructions in 1754 definitely directed him to proceed to Bombay for the monsoon, "as it will not be safe for the ships of the squadron to remain on the coast of Coromandel later than the first week of October," *Home Misc.* 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* p. 113.

Pulicat, where he joined Pearse and his troops on August 2nd. From thence, aiming at recapturing Arcot, he struck in to Trippasore, which he captured on August 23rd, with its garrison of 1,500 men but a disappointing supply of provisions. On the 27th he fought a victorious battle with Hyder at Pollilore. Here lack of provisions stopped his career. "After so important and signal a victory," he wrote to Hughes, "nothing can be more heartbreaking than the check my operations receive of wanting provisions and the means of carrying them." But for that want of food and transport, and that alone, for which Coote was not responsible, Hyder's continuance in the Carnatic would have become very difficult.<sup>1</sup> If Hyder were driven back from the neighbourhood of the coast the maritime threat represented by the French squadron would have been sensibly diminished, for, even though the French should arrive on the coast with reinforcements, they would find no native armies with which to co-operate: and alone the squadron and any troops it might bring could effect but little. The expulsion of Hyder from the Carnatic was, in fact, an alternative means of neutralising, not wholly but in great part, the influence which French sea power was capable of exerting. Even its capacity to exert pressure by cutting off supplies by sea would be reduced, for the recovered territories would soon be able to furnish some of the food urgently required for the people and the army. Advantageous, however, as the expulsion of Hyder would obviously be, it was beyond Coote's power. Lacking the means to carry rice enough for his army, he could not make the continuous movements necessary, or, in the case of victory, conduct a destructive and decisive pursuit.

While Coote was thus engaged in these operations in defence of the Company's scattered positions, Hughes remained in his cruising station to windward off Negapatam, keeping himself supplied with water at the Danish settle-

<sup>1</sup> Coote to Hughes, from Trippasore, September 4th, 1781.



ment of Tranquebar. But he was far from content with this passive attitude. Convinced as he was that the French would reappear in strength on the coast and that the whole situation would then depend upon who should then be in possession of the two ports, Negapatam and Trincomali, he did not cease urging that the army should co-operate with the squadron in their capture. "The squadron still continues off Negapatam, partly on the first great principle of encountering any force of our enemies coming on the coast before they can disembark troops, and partly to co-operate with Colonel Nixon if he appears off Negapatam."<sup>1</sup> The prospects, however, of Nixon's coming to Negapatam were small. He was then in command of a part of the Southern Army under Brathwaite, which was engaged in holding Tanjore, into which territory Hyder's marauding bands had pushed in great numbers. Brathwaite had so far held his own. No important positions had been lost, but beyond this the Southern Army could achieve nothing positive. But Brathwaite feared the effects of reducing the defence. Hence, to all Hughes's proposals that a detachment should be made to capture Negapatam, both Brathwaite and Nixon turned a deaf ear. They pointed out that any weaknesses of the army might mean the loss of Tanjore and Trichinopoly, but they failed to see the larger issue—that loss of command at sea meant the loss of far more, and that Negapatam and Trincomali were the trumps in the game.

So time passed without a decision. By mid-September only a bare month remained before Hughes must leave the coast unless some operation justifying the risk of staying there were to be taken in hand: and every day's delay increased the danger of interruption by gales on the coast and swollen rivers on land. As the month advanced and news from Mauritius indicated the probable early arrival of French reinforcements of ships and troops, Hughes became increas-

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Coote, September 22nd, 1781.

ingly anxious to secure the enemy naval bases before their squadron should reach the Coromandel coast, and to be free to move the British squadron to the Malabar coast, where, if the French should arrive before January, he expected them to put in their first appearance. He was not prepared to remain, and risk his squadron off this lee shore, merely for the purpose of affording minor forms of tactical assistance, such as providing gun platforms, to Nixon; but if any major operation were intended he was willing to stay. But for all his enquiries he could get no decision as to whether Negapatam or Trincomali would be attempted. He knew that the Madras Council desired the capture of the Dutch ports, but he could get nothing but evasive answers from both Brathwaite and Nixon. At length, by way of bringing about a decision, he wrote to the Select Committee and definitely announced his intention of proceeding to the Malabar coast to meet the French. "I think it necessary to inform you," he wrote, "that I cannot remain with the squadron on this coast beyond the 16th of next month unless you apply to me in form desiring me to continue, and pointing out the services to be performed by such stay on the coast."<sup>1</sup>

Before any reply was received from the Madras Council a new question as to policy arose. On October 3rd the *Monarca* and *Active* joined Hughes off Negapatam—his first reinforcement. From Captain Gell of the *Monarca* Hughes learnt of the failure of the Cape expedition, and, in addition, that General Medows was now on his way to India, escorted by the three ships detached by Johnstone. As these ships had sailed before the *Monarca* it was reasonable to expect that they could not now be far distant and the question as to how this military reinforcement should proceed needed immediate decision. Hughes at once wrote (Oct. 4th) to Macartney and Coote for instructions in order that the sea commanders might be informed as to where they

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Select Committee, September 26th, 1781.

were to go and what they were to do. He particularly wished the fighting ships to join him on the East coast; but if the General or the Committee wished the troops to be used on the Malabar coast against Hyder, he would go there and join them: for concentration of the squadron, in the face of what he now knew the French had at Mauritius, was necessary.

Macartney, with his eyes fixed on extensions of the Company's territory, desired the troops to be sent to capture Ceylon. "All our instructions imply a hope in the Court of Directors that we should scarcely leave the Dutch a footing in the East"<sup>1</sup>: and a week later, "The overthrow of Indian Princes is among us a slighter gratification and a lesser object of national policy than advantages over European enemies."<sup>2</sup> As optimistic as he had been of making peace with Hyder, Macartney again thought that we had only to invite the Mahrattas to make peace and they would do so. If this were done Goddard could be sent from Bombay on the long-deferred operation against Mangalore which would force Hyder to withdraw to Mysore to protect his own territory. The existing forces, he argued, would be sufficient to do this and Medows's new army would be available for some other purpose. "The reinforcement now on the way should, from this reasoning, be employed to some great and permanent purposes by the Company. Nothing is so advantageous and essential to the Company's possessions in Bengal and Coromandel, as well as necessary for His Majesty's fleet, as the possession of the whole of Ceylon. After the conquest of that island there would still be sufficient time to proceed against Mangalore should Hyder not by then have retreated from the Carnatic."

The viciousness of this proposal to dissipate force in undertaking a new conquest is clear. The French squadron and army are ignored. Territorial conquest for its own sake,

<sup>1</sup> Macartney to Hughes, October 22nd, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Macartney to India House, October 29th, 1781.

not for a military advantage, is suggested. There is indeed a reference to the naval advantage, but the conquest of the island was not necessary for that ; the harbour of Trincomali alone was all that was needed. A peace with the Mahrattas was assumed to be possible, although, even if this were obtainable it could not be got for several months ; and time was most precious. The proposal assumed to be practicable that which the whole campaign hitherto had shown to be impracticable—the chasing of Hyder out of the Carnatic by an army unprovided with transport or sufficient cavalry. The great object of all is ignored—that of preventing the European forces from assisting Hyder. To attain this, two courses of action were open—either to drive Hyder from the coast so that when the enemy came he would find no one with whom to join hands ; or to cripple the power of the enemy at sea and render it impossible for him to maintain himself on the coast. The one demanded the utmost superiority of force possible on land in the Carnatic, either by massing forces on the Coromandel coast or a combination of mass and diversion. The other demanded the employment of a military force as quickly as possible against the positions the enemy squadron would require, combined with a defensive on land against Hyder. Taking into consideration the approach of the October rains, with the consequent difficulty of movement on land, the lack of transport, and the result of the enemy squadron obtaining the use of Trincomali, the advantages of resolute action against the sea forces are apparent. The effort needed was less : the probability of success greater. Meadows's troops, if they arrived in time, could either form the expeditionary force or could join Coote in his defensive in the Carnatic.

Coote was strongly opposed to Macartney's proposal. Ceylon, he agreed, would be a valuable possession for the Company—"an object of the greatest national importance"—but its capture must await the decision against Hyder.

The enemy in the field must first be beaten. In terms almost identical with those used by Hughes he indicated that Hyder's army was the great objective; and that being so, the proper employment of Medows's force was against it. As to whether it should be used to create superiority by concentration or diversion, he was uncompromisingly at this time opposed to the latter, unless weather conditions rendered the former impossible. "It is, in my judgment," he wrote on October 10th, "highly improper to think of landing His Majesty's forces under General Medows on the Malabar coast. I have my doubts whether all our difficulties have not arisen from too much attention in that quarter." As to Negapatam, if it were taken (and—as we have seen—he did not anticipate success in that venture) "infinite service would be rendered to operations in the Carnatic by attacking Mysore from the South, through the Caroor Pass, which would force Hyder to fall back to defend his own territories." He agreed, however, notwithstanding what he had said about a Malabar operation, that if a landing could not be made at Negapatam, an attack on Mangalore would produce a useful diversion.

His letter fully supported the value of an early capture of Negapatam from the point of view of the operations on land, if it could be taken; as it agreed with the desirability of obtaining peace with the Mahrattas, if this could be procured. He had no objection to making another effort to obtain peace, and so far concurred in Macartney's views as to have signed, jointly with him and Hughes, a letter to the Minister at Poona on September 11th expressing a desire for an immediate and lasting peace. But knowing that no help could possibly be got from Bombay in time he quietly ignored Macartney's schemes of conquest and asked Hughes to send orders to Medows to come with all speed to the Coromandel coast.

While these several examinations of the problem were being made by the Governor of Madras, the Admiral and the

General, the Governor-General and Council at Calcutta were making their own estimate. Hastings was becoming increasingly anxious in consequence of the financial drain on Bengal and the dissipation of strength in Bombay which prevented a concentration of effort against Hyder. He therefore wrote to Bombay with the aim of inducing that Government to desist from its attempts at aggrandisement and to co-operate with the Madras Presidency. "Not all the provisions and extra revenue and credit which the Government is able to supply can do more," he wrote, "even when we command the sea, than subsist the army on the coast of the Coromandel and enable it to march through the desolated tracts of the Carnatic to meet the enemy where he chooses to stand, and relieve those interior fortresses which, should they once fall under the dominion of Hyder, would advance the limits of his Kingdom almost to the walls of Fort St. George." While the enemy was himself secured from invasion by the desolated country, the Company was obliged to maintain a large army in the field for self-defence and were under "the momentous disadvantage that while we are thus situated on the coast of Coromandel our European enemies may, if they come in superior naval forces, unite with Hyder and starve us out of our strongest hold in the country."<sup>1</sup>

To invade Hyder's country through the devastated Carnatic being impossible, Hastings put forward the alternative of making use of our superiority at sea. "The query then is," he wrote, "whether it is not expedient to leave our posts on the Carnatic unprotected and *while we are superior at sea* to embark our troops from Fort St. George and invade Hyder upon his own coast: or supposing that it should be found impracticable to effect a peace with the Mahrattas by any formal stipulations, that you (the Bombay Government) should relinquish all the countries upon the Continent

<sup>1</sup> Protest by the Governor-General and Council to the President and Secret Committee, Bombay, December 26th, 1781.



that you cannot maintain if a considerable part of your army is withdrawn, and that after garrisoning Bombay and other posts effectually, you should, with the remainder of your forces, make an exertion against Hyder where he is most vulnerable in his own dominions." With true wisdom he suggested that if a peace with the Mahrattas were not possible, it would be preferable to withdraw from the Mahratta war rather than conduct it feebly. To suppose the Company capable of conducting a war of conquest against the Mahrattas and at the same time defend the Carnatic was, in his words, to suppose an impossibility. If the Carnatic should be lost the enemy would be immovably established there, and the English would then be exposed to the operations of an enemy, favourably situated, who "could choose his own season of attack if superior at sea, or if successful in raising more enemies on the northern and western coasts." The loss of places dependent upon Bombay would be far less serious, for they could be recovered at leisure. If, then, it were not possible to arrange a peace with the Mahrattas, the policy Hastings urged was one of a strict defensive in the Bombay Presidency, and the strongest offensive against Hyder. The approach to his territory through the Carnatic being impossible, the possibility of invading Mysore by sea, either from the Carnatic or Malabar, should be considered. But the shadow of the French squadron hung over both proposals. Superiority at sea being the essential condition of either course of action, the steps necessary for ensuring superiority, or, at the worst, for preventing the enemy from obtaining the advantages of command if he came with superior force, should have taken precedence of everything else. The foundations of security lay in the possession of Trincomali and Negapatam.

While this discussion was in progress, Hughes was again in correspondence with Colonel Brathwaite on the subject of taking Negapatam with the existing Southern Army.

To his letter of September 26th<sup>1</sup> the Committee replied promptly on the 29th. They were wholly in favour of taking Negapatam for the results it would afford. Its capture, they replied, would annihilate the Dutch influence in the peninsula, dissolve the Dutch connection with Hyder, open the resources of the Southern countries to us, and lessen the number of our enemies. To delay the attempt until after the monsoon would allow the French and Dutch fleets—for the latter had now also to be considered—to arrive on the coast, or permit Hyder to cross the Coleroon which now he could not do, and render the capture of Negapatam impracticable. The operation was impossible without the squadron. Hence they urged Hughes to remain.

But though the Committee were thus in full agreement with Hughes, Colonel Brathwaite refused to take part in what he considered an impracticable task. His instructions from Coote were to expel all of Hyder's forces from Tanjore, and from those he could not depart; nor did he think it safe to attempt anything on the coast. He had difficulties with food and transport which hindered the movement of troops in the country, and he could not at one and the same time drive Hyder out of the country and spare men to capture Negapatam. The question of whether the capture of Negapatam itself would not contribute most effectively to the attainment of his object does not appear to have been considered by him. There were those who considered that it would. According to both Hughes and others the supply and transport problem would be made easier, one set of enemies and a source of supply to Hyder's armies would be destroyed, and the task of expelling Hyder's armies would be thereby lightened. Tanjore would, it is true, be open to the ravages of Hyder's forces, undisturbed, while the siege was in progress; or the besiegers might, as Coote had feared, find themselves attacked from the land. Nega-

<sup>1</sup> *Vide, ante, p. 161.*



patam moreover might, as Brathwaite had suggested, prove a harder nut than it was supposed to be, though Brathwaite admitted that his information about it was but slight. These military risks could not be ignored. But there were far greater risks still if the place were left in the hands of the enemy for the use of the French squadron and the Dutch forces on land.

But if troops from the Southern Army were not available, could none have been spared from Madras? This did not escape Coote's attention. He had at that moment the design of capturing Chillumbrum, an important position somewhat to the southward of Cuddalore, in order to facilitate the provisioning of his troops who otherwise could be fed, when operating in that part, for twelve days only. The expedition was in preparation and Hughes had agreed to assist by sea. But at that moment the news arrived that Hyder was approaching with a large force and the army might be cut off at the Palar river from Cuddalore, and Cuddalore itself, though recently strengthened, might fall. Which was the more important—to send troops to take Negapatam or to tackle Hyder?

Coote held a Council of War. Munro, Stuart, Colonels Owen and Crawford took part. To the Council he put three questions. Should the design against Chillumbrum be proceeded with? Whether, and if so in what manner, the Madras Army should co-operate with the squadron in the capture of Negapatam? And whether to march with all the force to Cuddalore, with the object of bringing Hyder to a general action?

Munro was in favour of the move to Cuddalore and fighting Hyder. Stuart agreed: to bring the enemy to action should be the great object, and later the army should attack Negapatam. Crawford and Owen were of the same view. It was due to the sudden approach of Hyder and the threat this constituted to the freedom of movement in further operations and to the security of Cuddalore itself, that

troops from Madras could not be spared at that moment for the capture of Negapatam. Hyder was the immediate danger, and he must be dealt with immediately.

The purpose of discussing this obscure and remote problem is not to criticise Coote, or Brathwaite, or Hughes. The value of the incident lies in the example it gives of the conflicting claims which almost infallibly arise in a joint sea and land campaign ; of the great disability of discussing plans by correspondence, as these were all being discussed ; of the need for an effective means of arriving at a reasoned decision ; and of the difficulty of finding an authority which shall have the capacity to see and understand the problem as a whole, to distinguish what is the great object of all, and to decide, between the several solutions, where the concentrated effort shall be made : boldly evacuating minor positions and accepting temporary losses in order to achieve that which will decide the whole. Such a body there was not. The Select Committee of Madras was a governing body, but it was not composed of men who deserved or commanded respect. Its opinions were indeed often right, as the opinions of any intelligent body of men are bound to be, but they were also often deplorably wrong. But above all, a Committee is not a body well constituted to direct war.

To the present writer it appears that solutions of such matters are most properly to be solved by the two Commanders-in-Chief, discussing the question together in person ; certainly not by correspondence. It cannot be impossible, or indeed difficult, for two men, trained to think in terms of strategy, with such understanding of each other's needs and powers as men in these positions should be expected to possess, to distinguish clearly what the principal object of their joint operations should be, and what course of action promises most effectively to attain it. That all the victories on land in the Carnatic, all the conquests of territory or defence of positions, would count for nothing if command

at sea were lost, must have been made clear in open talk : for, indeed, it was an axiom of the defence of India, as Clive well knew. Whether that command was more likely to be assured by the capture of Mahavarapam, by a " *guerre de chicane* " of chasing fragments of Hyder's rabble across the Coleroon, or by ensuring that the enemy squadron should possess no base within 2,000 miles, could assuredly be examined dispassionately by such men, and the proper solution made.

Although no decision was given, the Committee expressed their concurrence with the capture of Negapatam and formally requested the Admiral to remain on the coast in order to take part in it. Assured by this that an effort would be made, Hughes prepared to remain, and proceeded to revictual his ships at once to do so. He renewed his application to Brathwaite for information as to whether he was coming down to the coast. " I should have been with you long ago," Brathwaite replied, " but I have a garrison of the first importance and a rich kingdom to preserve and recover." No efforts of Hughes were able to make him see that the landing of European troops at Negapatam was a danger far greater than a temporary devastation of a part of Tanjore. If the French troops landed, the loss of the whole territory was made probable.

At the same time that Hughes tried to persuade Brathwaite, he addressed Macartney in the same sense, urging a decision. Here he was preaching to the already converted, for the Governor had decided that action must be taken and had tried to persuade Sir Hector Munro, who, at the conferences in June, had agreed with the proposal to take command. Macartney at the same time tried to make Brathwaite move, pointing out, in its larger issues, the need for taking Negapatam, and repeating in other words what Hughes had said : " What think you of the garrison of Negapatam added to that of the enemy, which will be

the case unless the place is reduced before the squadron quits the coast?" Brathwaite, however, remained of the opinion that, for tactical reasons, the operation was too dangerous. Coote shared this view. "I will venture to foretell that if the attack on Negapatam is commenced leaving an enemy in the rear to cope with our besieging army, and they move towards its relief, we shall be disgraced, and if we are not more fortunate than we have a right to expect, it will terminate in the loss of Tanjore, Trichinopoly and all the southern countries as well as bring on the ruin of this army."<sup>1</sup> Coote's objection now was not based upon Negapatam being an undesirable strategical objective. He was fully alive to the value of our getting possession: but he doubted the possibility of success.

Munro accepted the command. He arrived off Negapatam from Madras in the *Active* on October 17th. Most fortunately the weather was still holding, though each day the risk of its breaking increased, but "for a place of such consequence as Negapatam is either to us, or the enemy, something must be risked," said Hughes. He had organised everything beforehand in detail and was completely ready. A seaman's battalion of 827 men, with artificers and smiths, and the whole of the squadron's marines of 443 men had been in training; rafts and catamarans had been provided for landing the artillery; eighteen guns and eight mortars, with all their ammunition, were ready to be put ashore. A detachment from the Southern Army of 435 men arrived from Tanjore on the 21st, and on the 22nd the ships' battalions were landed with their guns through a heavy surf. It was a fine piece of work.

The naval battalions, under one post-captain as "Colonel," and two others as "Lieutenant-Colonels," were ordered to co-operate with Sir Hector Munro to the utmost in all measures for the attack of the place. Under his command

<sup>1</sup> Coote to Macartney, October 31st, 1781.

matters proceeded successfully. The outer lines were carried by storm on the 29th, and ground was opened against the north face of the town. On November 7th, when the first battery of 18-pounders was ready, some ships of the squadron were moved in to assist in the bombardment and the town was summoned. Very properly the Governor refused and replied by making some desperate sallies. These were beaten back with loss. More batteries began breeching on the 10th, and then the enemy demanded a parley, with the result that terms of capitulation were agreed to on November 12th. All merchandise and munitions, artillery numbering some 218 guns, and arms to the amount of over 3,000 muskets and bayonets, were to be surrendered; and the fortifications were to be destroyed. Hyder's troops who had taken part in the defence—or such few as remained, for the majority of his 2,300 had already bolted—were to be permitted to return to their country without arms.

Thus all the fears that the besiegers would be attacked by the Mysorean army, which had formed the main part of Brathwaite's objections to the operations, proved groundless. The enemy had showed himself an effective marauder, but with no stomach for a decisive battle. Hughes's expectations as to the results of the military campaign were fully realised.<sup>1</sup> All the forts and strong places held by Hyder's troops in that part were at once evacuated, and the petty princes in two provinces who, encouraged by Hyder's successes, had at his instigation taken arms against us, returned to their obedience on the best terms they could make. Thus the military situation was improved on land. Not less was it improved at sea. The squadron now had a good watering place to windward, and another anchorage, landing-place and source of supply were denied to the French, if they should come. How much the campaign depended upon the occupation of the landing-places the whole series of operations, culminating in Stuart's urgent

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Lord Hillsborough, January 2nd, 1782.

desire to recapture Cuddalore in 1783, abundantly testifies. Coote, though he had expressed opinions adverse to the operation on military grounds, was very well alive to the importance of the capture; and indeed expressed himself strongly in disapprobation of the destruction of the defences, which, he considered, should have been retained to ensure holding the place; for Coote was ever alive to the naval situation. Of the capture he expressed himself in no sparing words. "The public are principally indebted," he wrote, "for this important acquisition to the unwearied application and perseverance of the Admiral and to the powerful aid he afforded by landing so formidable a body of seamen and marines."

With Negapatam in his hands, Hughes's next step was to take Trincomali. The frigate *Seahorse* had been kept steadily cruising off the harbour since August to block up the shipping within and prevent reinforcements from without from arriving by sea. But the tenth battalion of sepoys, which had been ordered to embark, failed to do so. Whether, as Hughes supposed, actuated by promptings of their officers who, hearing of Hyder's approach, wished to preserve their corps complete, or because of caste objections to crossing the water, cannot be said, but desertions immediately took place and the battalion melted away. Thus it came about that the only military force furnished by the Company consisted of thirty Europeans and native artillery and 500 sepoy volunteers. These troops, if indeed "troops" they could be called, were of the worst possible description. Of the whole 500, 200 were coolies who had never handled any weapons more warlike than the pick and shovel, while the remainder, in Hughes's words, was "composed of all the outcasts of all the corps at Negapatam . . . and very little service can be at first expected from such a rabble, however useful they may be made against a future period."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Macartney, January 1st, 1782.

Added to the unpromising material was the lack of any covering force by land, against what appeared a probable attack by other Dutch forces. Within eighty miles of Trincomali, and joined to it by a road, passable apparently,<sup>1</sup> stood Jaffna, another Dutch fortress of importance, manned with a larger garrison. Jaffna was the only place except the sea from whence help could be sent to Trincomali when besieged, and from whence Trincomali, if it were in British hands, could be recaptured.<sup>2</sup> It constituted therefore a threat similar in kind to that, visualised by Brathwaite, of Hyder's troops in the attack on Negapatam; and the garrison, though mainly Malay, had European officers who might be expected to show more initiative than the partisan leaders of Mysore. Munro saw clearly how the capture, unless it succeeded by *coup de main*, might be ruined by the arrival of a force from Jaffna, and he proposed sending a body of troops by water in long-boats to snatch Jaffna before the attempt on Trincomali.<sup>3</sup> One of his officers, sent in a squadron long-boat, reported that the fortress could be taken without difficulty, and a part of the troops from Tanjore was at first detailed for the service; but when all was ready the whole force was recalled into Tanjore, except the so-called battalion for the attack on Trincomali. So little were the significance and importance of Trincomali appreciated by those who had the main direction of affairs.

Tempestuous weather, beginning on November 12th, true

<sup>1</sup> Ammunition, water and provisions were sent from Jaffna to Trincomali by road, by elephants, coolies and draught cattle, in the following June. Hughes says the road was a good one. *Colombo Archives*.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, when Suffren besieged Trincomali in September, troops were sent from Jaffna to assist the French army. The rapid capitulation of the skeleton garrison, however, rendered their movement unnecessary.

<sup>3</sup> Suffren later regarded Jaffna with anxiety. "I have no doubt," he wrote on May 15th, "that if they (the British) have many troops they will go either by land, or by sea, as near as possible, to attack Jaffna, which would render it very difficult to send you help, above all if I should lose the balance of strength at sea." (To Falck, after learning that Trincomali had been reinforced.)

monsoon gales from the north-east with heavy rain and an impassable surf on the beach, delayed the re-embarkation at Negapatam. On the 25th the prisoners were got on board and sent to Madras, but the heavy artillery and captured guns could not be got off till towards the end of December, and it was not until January 2nd that the squadron<sup>1</sup> sailed for Trincomali. Two days later it arrived in Back Bay on a grey calm morning with the steady downpour of rain that often occurs at this season of the year.

The beach, though open to the north-east, was thus untroubled by breakers to hamper the disembarkation, and the naval battalion that had fought at Negapatam, together with two companies of the sepoy pioneers, was put ashore at once, using six large chillingas and four catamarans brought from Negapatam for the purpose. The disembarkation was made without opposition about three miles to the northward of the fort, measures were taken to secure the landing of the remainder, and by nightfall the whole force, under the command of Captain Gell of the *Monarca*, was on shore. The pioneer company of the Marines, dragging two six-pounders, marched at once upon the fort, which fell into their hands without resistance; indeed, the Marines pushed their way through the great archway at the same moment as the Governor of the fort was in the act of drawing up the terms he meant to propose for capitulation. The reason for this easy capture was at once made apparent. The place had been practically evacuated and was held only by invalids, the whole effective Dutch garrison having been concentrated at the principal fort, *Ostenburg*, a strong place in a commanding position on the end of a ridge overlooking the mouth and interior of the harbour.

The next two days were spent in landing stores and making

<sup>1</sup> Superb, *Monarca*, *Exeter*, *Worcester*, *Burford*, *Eagle*; Combustion fireship, *Nymph* sloop, *Expedition* brig and *Essex* E.I. Co. ship. The troops were embarked on board *Monarca*, *Worcester* and *Essex* and consisted of 506 rank and file.



preparations to move upon Ostenburg. On January 8th the advance was begun. The seamen and marines moving up the wooded hill in blazing heat through paths cut through the bush, met with no opposition until they reached an outpost within about two hundred yards of the fort. This they rushed. They then held a commanding position from whence bombardment would present no difficulty. An officer was sent therefore to the fort to request surrender. The Governor, an old personal friend of Hughes's whom he had often met in his many visits to Trincomali, refused ; whereon a second message was sent to impress upon him the hopelessness of his position and the result to which, if the place had to be stormed, the garrison exposed itself by resistance. This message having no better effect, preparations for the assault were made under the general direction of Major Geils, an engineer of the East India Company's service. A storming company of 450 seamen and marines armed with cutlasses, with a flanking party of seamen and pioneers carrying scaling ladders, were assigned to the assault, to be followed by a reserve of three companies of seamen and the sepoys. The preparation for the final assault occupied another two days.

At break of day on January 11th the advance was made. The watch kept in the fort was evidently bad, for a sergeant's party on reaching the walls was able to clamber in unperceived through one of the embrasures. The stormers scrambled in after them, and though the garrison, then awake, offered some opposition, it was not severe. Some rough hand-to-hand fighting took place, but all resistance was rapidly overcome at the slight cost of one officer and twenty men killed, and two officers and four men wounded.<sup>1</sup> The shipping in the harbour, including two rich Indiamen, none of which had been able to escape in consequence of the Seahorse's blockade, was taken.

<sup>1</sup> The garrison consisted of 250 European infantry, 50 European artillery, 55 seamen, 10 artificers, and 14 officers. The artillery consisted of 79 guns.

Thus at this diminutive cost a position of the highest strategical importance fell into the hands of the British. Their squadron would now have a port in which it could remain close to the coast, while the French squadron would be without one. In order, however, that full use could be made of it, two conditions needed fulfilling. First, that a superior force should be available to act ; and secondly that the place should be capable of defending itself during such time as the squadron should be absent. Lord Rochford, in one of his despatches to Sir Robert Harland,<sup>1</sup> had confidently assured the Admiral that the squadron in the East Indies should never be left inferior to the French, and if that assurance had been carried into effect the first of these needs would have been fulfilled. The second required the presence of an adequate garrison to hold out until relieved. But neither of these conditions was fulfilled. The blame for the inferiority of the squadron rests primarily upon the British Government which in the years preceding the war had neglected their duties and allowed the Navy to decline ; and upon the Board of Admiralty which during the war itself had abandoned the sound method, proved in two successful wars, of concentrating superior force to the westward against the main body of the French fleet. That policy had been replaced by one of sending small parcels of ships to the outer stations as occasion appeared to require, and almost invariably too late ; a policy which left the initiative to the enemy, and obliged us to follow his motions, in contradistinction to one of anticipating and frustrating his efforts. It is not to be pretended, nor was it ever imagined, that every single ship or small squadron of the enemy could be stopped. But there was good reason, based on the experience of the Western squadron, to count upon intercepting a proportion and making it hazardous for the enemy to send out any large bodies of ships.

Although the Board's departure from sound strategical

<sup>1</sup> Rochford to Harland, August 30th, 1771.

principles was the primary cause of the inferiority of the East Indian squadron, the blame for this weakness lies also at the doors of the officers at sea. Johnstone, by his failure to take precautions at Porto Praya, his failure to pursue Suffren after the battle, and his instructions to the Hannibal to cruise off the Cape, contributed his share to the difficulties of Hughes's situation and the eventual loss of Trincomali. But the tale of mistakes does not end there. The three ships sent with the convoy leaving the Cape on July 25th were delayed by contrary winds, and did not reach Madagascar until August 21st. From thence, against the strongly expressed advice of the experienced captains of the East India Company ships,<sup>1</sup> Captain Alms (who had certainly himself made the eastern voyage while a half-pay officer) then took the unusual westerly course of going to Johanna instead of going direct to Anjengo. When the convoy arrived at that island twelve days later scurvy had begun and was already making terrible progress on board the ships; water, too, was short. Six hundred men were put ashore, and it was another three weeks before they were sufficiently recovered to return. By these delays the monsoon was missed, and instead of arriving on the Malabar coast as they should have done, in December, they had by then only reached the Morabat Gulf on the Arabian coast. Captain Alms, well knowing the need of joining Hughes with the least delay, left the slower transports to follow him and taking the 98th regiment and General Medows on board his squadron, sailed for Bombay, which he reached in January. Pausing no longer than was necessary for watering he hastened round to Madras. His promptitude was rewarded, for he succeeded in joining Hughes a bare six days before the Admiral's first engagement. There can hardly be a doubt that without his reinforcement the six British ships must have been crushed by the twelve of the enemy. Even so Alms's force was far below its paper strength. Fever, caught at Johanna, and

<sup>1</sup> Narrative of Colonel Patrick Ross, *Melville Papers*.

scurvy, the result of his long sea cruise, had swept away both the seamen and the troops in great numbers.

Two other ships, the *Magnanime* and *Sultan*, were ordered to the East Indies in June 1781—no less than two months after it had been known in London that Suffren had gone thither. They were ordered to call at St. Helena—an unusual course<sup>1</sup> which added to the length of the voyage and was sharply criticised by Hughes. Although their Captains were well aware of the urgent need for their ships in India, they not only remained six weeks at the Island, but still further delayed their progress by towing a prize most of the way to Madras. In consequence of this dilatory behaviour, instead of joining Hughes in time to help him against Suffren's superior force, they did not reach the Coromandel coast until March 31st; and then, with crews literally prostrated by scurvy, "more like hospital ships than men-of-war," in Hughes's words.

One gleam of light shines in this unfortunate story. Immediately after it became known in London that Suffren had sailed, the *Monarca*, Captain Gell, was ordered to reinforce Johnstone. Gell sailed on April 18th and proceeded to the African coast; but Johnstone had already left when he arrived. With a true instinct Gell made the fastest passage possible for India, making no delays for searching for French East Indiamen. He reached the Admiral on October 3rd with his crew fit, well and in readiness for service. Not without reason did Hughes compare Gell's conduct with that of the others, and complain of the "very

<sup>1</sup> Their instructions were to keep well to the westward of Spain and Portugal, call at St. Helena for water, or, if possible to do so, at Rio, avoid the Cape of Good Hope, keeping on a high latitude to get the wind. If the Malabar coast was reached in November or December, to touch at Anjengo for intelligence. To disembark the troops they carried wherever the military commander in India desired and to inform Hughes, who would be at Bombay, of their arrival. If unable to reach India in November or December, to go to Fort St. George direct: if hostilities were in progress disembark the troops there and co-operate with the army. *Orders and Instructions*, May 20th, 1781.

injudicious manner" in which the reinforcements made their voyages. "Had these ships been conducted with common prudence and the least attention to the orders they were under, *or the motive of their being sent to the East Indies*, His Majesty's squadron had not to struggle for a superiority over the enemy's. Had they arrived in due time in the East Indies our superiority would have been decisive both in numbers and force."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Lord Weymouth, May 10th, 1782.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BATTLE OF FEBRUARY 17TH, 1782

TRINCOMALI was surrendered on January 11th. No sooner was Hughes in possession than he busied himself with putting the place in as strong a posture of defence as his means allowed and with watering his squadron sufficiently to last it to Madras. It was with great difficulty that he got enough water even for this short voyage, for the supplies at that port are scanty and bad—a fact which affected the course of the campaign in its later stages. This done he sailed for Madras on February 4th to get provisions and stores, of both of which the squadron was in great need, and when he anchored there on February 8th he learned from Macartney that the French had come at last. Thirty sail of French ships were reported sixty miles to the northward.

From the moment when he had sailed with his motley force from Negapatam Hughes had pointed out in the clearest and most unequivocal terms that this small and insufficient body of troops would not furnish an adequate garrison for Trincomali. At that moment it was unquestionably impossible to spare men from the main army, for it was then making an effort, under conditions of singular difficulty, to relieve Vellore, where supplies were reported to be sufficient only to enable it to hold out till January 11th. Coote effected this relief on the 9th, and the army began its return to Madras on the 13th.

On January 12th the Council replied to Hughes that until Coote's army returned, and they knew what was required, they could do nothing to strengthen the Trincomali garrison. Troops would then become available. But when a few

days later Coote returned, although all the posts were then secured and the army could undertake no decisive operations for want of transport, the Council decided not to do anything to strengthen Trincomali. If emergencies should arise, they replied, the Admiral should apply to the officer "nearest the place where the reinforcement was needed." Emergencies, however, have an unfortunate way of arising suddenly in war; reinforcements take time to embark and reach their destination; and the Admiral might not be in a position in which he could make his application. The Council was well aware that Hughes expected hard fighting at sea, for no less recently than December 12th he had written that the French squadron "under the command of so active an officer as Mr. Suffrain" would no doubt try to effect something on one or the other coast. They had every reason to know that command at sea was the foundation of their security in a European war, for they had been given a lively reminder of it when d'Orves had paid them his unwelcome visit; only recently, too, both Madras and Calcutta had been pressing upon Hughes the absolute necessity of preventing any break in the flow of shipping between Bengal and the Coromandel coast "on which the supply of our army and settlements there with money, provisions and everything necessary to their preservation absolutely depends."<sup>1</sup> Yet, knowing all this, they chose to procrastinate.

The Council's refusal to face obvious facts did not satisfy the Admiral. On receipt of their vague reply he at once reiterated his statement that the squadron was inadequate to cover Trincomali from attack and to give defence on the coast of Madras; and he again urged that troops should be sent.<sup>2</sup> A fortnight later, when he had returned to Madras to meet his expected naval reinforcement, he repeated his request. "I hope your Lordship," he ended, "will not

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wheler to Hughes, September 24th, 1781. *Ad.*, 7, 757.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes to Macartney, January 20th, 1782.

delay a moment to send a reinforcement there.”<sup>1</sup> For he felt certain that Suffren’s arrival with a superior force could not be far off. Nor indeed was it. The French squadron was already close to the coast of India, and only on the day before the command had passed from the feeble hands of d’Orves into the very capable ones of “that active officer, Mr. Suffrain.”

The intentions of the French Government as to the strategy to be employed were set out in the instructions issued to d’Orves. Dated March 1781, and addressed jointly to M. de Souillac and d’Orves, they stated that a reinforcement of 1,200 men and five ships of the line was being sent. The English were believed, with practical certainty, to be no more than five ships strong in India, and their reinforcement to consist of no more than four ships. D’Orves therefore, with the six ships already in the East and the five on their way, would have a definite superiority over Hughes whether or not the latter were joined by Johnstone. The possibility of intercepting Johnstone’s reinforcement before it reached India was to be kept in view: for it was certain that Hughes could not leave Indian waters to meet it, tied there, as he was bound to be, by the threat of Mauritius, from whence the Commanders were authorised to draw as many as 1,500 men to strengthen their expeditionary force.

A very free hand was accorded to the French Commanders. The great object to be attained was the ruin of the English commerce and those settlements which it was possible to attack. Stress was laid upon the superiority of the force which d’Orves had at his disposal, and the concluding words stated that His Majesty expected him to profit at once by this opportunity and seek out and destroy the English squadron.<sup>2</sup>

As the working of the mind of a great commander is an interesting and informing study, it is not out of place here

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Macartney, February 4th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Appendix IV, p. 409.



to note the ideas which Suffren had held before he was acquainted with the above quoted instructions, as to the course of a campaign in India. His first mission had been to protect the Dutch settlements. When he reached the Cape and had thus fulfilled a part of his task, he set down his views as to the further course of proceedings. His appreciation of the defensive value of offence is noteworthy and characteristic.

“ I have as yet done no more than study the war in India at a distance : not being in command I have only to obey. But since I have here seen the Dutch, I think that if one contemplates defending their possessions it will result in nothing but their pure loss ; for while one is at one place the English could be attacking others. If one goes to Batavia, the squadron runs the risk of being destroyed by disease and without any hope of again being made fit for service. As to the Moluccas, there is not one of them that could not be captured by a frigate, and perhaps at this very moment has been captured. I see one thing only to do if we have the means. That is, to attack Surat. If successful, with the money one could obtain there, sepoys could be raised, we could get the help of the Mahrattas and besiege Bombay. If that were taken, it would be easy to drive the English from the Malabar coast and by the help of Hyder Ali one could attack the Coromandel coast. As to Bengal, nothing is to be looked for there unless revolutions arise in India. If nothing can be done this year (1781), and if peace is not made, operations can be renewed next year. But nothing can be done without troops, less in India, where throughout there are fortifications and troops, than elsewhere, and in practically no part of which ships can approach the shore. The cost of eleven ships is too great to leave them idle or employ them merely in cruising.”<sup>1</sup>

Such were the general ideas which Suffren had formed while on his way to Mauritius. He reached the island on

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries, August 10th, 1781.

October 25th, 1781, and in Port Louis there was then assembled a squadron of eleven ships of 64 guns and over, two large frigates, and four of the lesser types.<sup>1</sup> The command of the whole force then came under Count d'Orves.

After transferring to d'Orves the ships he had brought with him, Suffren had a disagreeable foretaste of the indiscipline of the officers. He had appointed to command the *Annibal*, whose captain was killed at Porto Praya, Captain Morard de Galles who, in that action, had fought his ship, the *Intrépide*, with great gallantry. This appointment caused an outburst of protests from the Captains of the ships already at Mauritius, who openly complained of injustice to themselves and threatened to resign if their claims were not complied with. D'Orves, an amiable but weak man, after assuring Suffren he would act only as he desired, gave way and cancelled the appointment. The incident struck deeply into Suffren's mind. He wrote to de Castries reminding him that he had only accepted the command with repugnance, and that the Minister, to meet his wishes, had promised he should return in eighteen months. He now desired that he might return at once. "I greatly fear," he wrote, "that the spirit which is engendered by a great separation of time and distance from authority, by the amassing of money through trade, and by the hope that time and changes in the situation will pass the sponge over anything that may happen, cannot but be highly inconsistent with the military spirit and injurious above all to discipline, which is the very soul of service."<sup>2</sup> His forebodings were only to be too fully realised. The "island of Calypso" had played havoc with the captains.

Six weeks were spent at Port Louis in refitting the ships and restoring the sick to health, and on December 7th,

<sup>1</sup> *Orient*, *Héros*, \* *Annibal*, 74; *Brillant*, *Vengeur*, \* *Sphinx*, \* *Artésien*, \* *Bizarre*, *Sévère*, *Ajax*, *Flamand*, 64; *Pourvoyeuse*, 40; *Fine*, 36; *Subtile*, 26; *Fortune*, 18; *Sylphide*, 14; *Argus*, 12. The ships marked with asterisks were coppered.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to de Castries, Port Louis, November 7th, 1781. B. 4, 194.

having completed his complements with artificers of all necessary trades from the Royal Dockyard, d'Orves sailed for the Coromandel coast. His convoy carried 2,500 troops, commanded by M. Duchemin, destined to co-operate with Hyder Ali. What the situation was in India he did not know. His hope was that Johnstone had not yet arrived and that his own squadron of eleven heavy ships would fall upon Hughes with his five ships, or at the most seven if the *Monarca* and *Hannibal* had joined him. Negapatam and Trincomali were, so far as he knew, still in the Dutch hands. The former was considered certainly secure, as Hyder Ali was on the coast and was reputed to have detached a strong body of troops to aid in its defence. Trincomali, on the other hand, weakly defended, might have fallen into Hughes's hands: but this he felt would matter the less if he should arrive in time to interpose himself between Hughes and Johnstone and more particularly if he should meet Johnstone at sea and destroy him. How nearly these expectations of immediate victory at sea came to being fulfilled the narrative has shown.

On January 19th the French squadron had its first taste of good fortune. On that day the British 50-gun ship *Hannibal*, which, under Johnstone's instructions, had been wasting her time off the Cape and at St. Helena, was sighted and chased. She escaped; but three days later she was overhauled and captured, increasing thereby d'Orves's squadron to 12 ships, and at the same time placing in the hands of the French commander the important information that a British reinforcement of two of the line—the *Sultan* 74 and *Magnanime* 64, with an East India convoy, some munitions and some troops—was due to leave St. Helena a fortnight after the *Hannibal*. To engage the British before they could arrive was now of paramount importance.

Making every allowance for the gross mismanagement which led to the *Hannibal* being where she was, meeting her was a stroke of luck for Suffren. Luck, however, is rarely

one-sided. Hughes, too, had his share, for the enemy with his twelve ships only passed the latitude of Trincomali the day before Hughes, with his bare six, sailed : and though both squadrons were making for the same part of the Coromandel coast they never came in sight of each other. D'Orves's intention had been to make his landfall at Madras, giving Ceylon a wide berth, thus to fall upon the British squadron before warning could enable them to escape or draw in under the batteries.<sup>1</sup> Too often "le mieux est l'ennemi du bien." In this case wind and current carried him to the eastward, and he thereby missed catching Hughes before the reinforcement reached him. If d'Orves had made the usual landfall off Ceylon he would not improbably have met Hughes off Trincomali : if he missed him there, he must almost certainly have caught him off Madras, six strong only, and engaged in provisioning and watering. With such superiority of numbers<sup>2</sup> and circumstances there should be little doubt that all the support which the batteries of Fort St. George could give would not have prevented the destruction of the British squadron in the roadstead, if attack were made. Whether or not an attack would have been made it is impossible to say, for a decision had been taken not to attack if the enemy was anchored under the forts.<sup>3</sup>

This decision was one of the first acts of Suffren. On February 3rd d'Orves, a very sick man, feeling that his strength was at an end had transferred the command to Suffren. On the 4th the new commander had his captains on board, and had discussed with them the question of attacking the British at anchor. It was unanimously decided not to do so if the enemy were drawn up under

<sup>1</sup> Cunat, *Vie de Suffren*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> French: four 74; seven 64; two of 50. Total, 844 guns.

British: one 74; one 68; four of 64. Total, 398 guns.

<sup>3</sup> Suffren to de Souillac, March 12th, 1782. Cunat says that a plan of attack had been circulated by d'Orves before leaving Madras: he does not mention the Council of War held by Suffren after taking command.

the guns of the forts.<sup>1</sup> On the same evening Suffren got his first information that the British had captured both Negapatam and Trincomali.

The French squadron stood for the land, picking up on its way several of the rice vessels so badly needed in Madras. Two days later Suffren learned that his intended stroke against the six British ships was no longer possible as Hughes had been joined by three more : but his whereabouts were still uncertain. Madras was probable, and therefore after making the land at Pulicat he shaped course for that port and there, in the late afternoon of the 14th, Suffren sighted the British squadron of nine sail of the line and two frigates lying in the roadstead.

The news of the arrival of the French on the coast had preceded their appearance by but one day. It awoke the Council to the danger from the sea in a more effectual manner than all Hughes's warnings. In conveying the information to the Admiral, the Committee considered it necessary to accompany it with a letter of monition and advice. The enemy's first object, they remarked, would be to land French troops to assist Hyder, which, if it were done, would cause a serious crisis ; for the Mahrattas, though now inclined to peace, would be tempted to break off negotiations, and the Nizam, though neutral, to join the two other Powers against the English. Further, General Medows and his troops were hourly expected and might be attacked, an East India fleet of nine ships from England, escorted by the *Magnanime* and *Sultan*, might arrive at any time, and the money supplies and food ships from Bengal, without which Madras could not live, were now in danger. The letter ended by desiring that Hughes would use the most active exertions to relieve them from their danger.

<sup>1</sup> " Le 3 je rassemblai les capitaines. Je les consultai sur le parti que nous prendrions, si l'escadre anglaise était rangée sous les forts. L'avis unanime fut de ne pas les attaquer. Le 14. J'ai assemblé les capitaines, dont l'avis unanime a été de faire route."—Suffren to de Souillac, March 12th, 1782.

As a concise recapitulation of the situation the letter left little to be desired ; but it is not difficult to imagine that it was intensely irritating to Hughes. There was not one of these facts of which he was not fully aware. He had repeatedly warned the Committee that the French might appear at any moment. He had shown clearly that he was alive to the danger of the Mahratta war. He had asked, and in vain, that Trincomali might be made secure with a proper garrison. He resented the assumption that he was ignorant of his business. He resented the interference with his command implied in the concluding sentences. The patronising tone of the letter nettled him. It may be wrong that an officer should ever take offence, but human nature and hot weather are facts which no philosophy can overcome. He replied warmly that these details were all unnecessary " unless, Gentlemen, you suppose me ignorant of the state of affairs on this coast." He had prepared and was preparing to do this part : " do you, my Lord and Gentlemen, do yours. I meddle not in your department ; why will you not trust me in the proper management of His Majesty's squadron since His Majesty and my country have reposed that confidence in me ? "

Irritating to Hughes as the Council's assumption of the right, and the necessity, to advise the Admiral as to his conduct at this juncture, and distressing as it is to witness the Civil and Naval authorities engaged in recrimination with the enemy at the gates, it is permissible to connect the reason of his warmth with another incident, of which he had learned that very day. A portion of Medows's troops coming from the Cape, under Colonel Humbertson, had arrived at Anjengo on February 9th. The Commanders had there learned that the French had appeared on the coast, and had at once stopped their voyage and sent a letter overland to Hughes and Coote requesting instructions. Mr. Sullivan, the resident at Tanjore, took it upon himself to open this letter, informing the officers that he had full

powers for the management of affairs in the southern country, and that he approved their remaining at Anjengo. Both Hughes and Coote took the strongest exception to the Resident's impudent interference with their correspondence and his assumption of a power to decide—"a power that we neither have devolved nor will do so on any man or body of men. For as the responsibility of our conduct rests with us only, it is absurd to suppose we can trust the conduct of affairs for which we are responsible to any person or persons whatever, much less to your Resident at Tanjore who must be totally ignorant of our intentions and of the plans of the Commander-in-Chief in this country."<sup>1</sup>

With the relations between the Commanders and the Heads of the Civil Government in this condition, it is impossible to expect that whole-hearted co-operation which war, like any other human activity, demands. Between the principal sea and land commanders, on the other hand, the relations remained excellent. Coote was entirely helpful. Writing on the same day, he said that, thoroughly sensible as he was of the support Hughes had always given him, he wished to render any assistance he could to the squadron, and he offered to embark at once 200 men of the 98th Regiment—the regiment just arrived and accustomed therefore to the ships—to strengthen the crews: an offer which Hughes, very short-handed,<sup>2</sup> gratefully accepted; for scurvy had taken a hold and toll of many of his men besides those in the newly joined ships with Alms.

Activity at once reigned in the squadron. The men away watering were recalled that afternoon; next morning the troops were embarked and the squadron was hauled in and anchored in a secure line close to the forts, but in readiness

<sup>1</sup> Joint letter, Hughes and Coote to the Select Committee, February 15th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> He was 767 short of complement and had 328 sick on shore in addition, making 1,095 men short out of 4,725—practically 25 per cent. He had been able to get very little fresh provisions since October.

to put to sea : and it was in this position when the frigate *Fine*, scouting ahead of Suffren's squadron on its way from *Pulicat*, sighted and reported it next day.

The great French Commander's later conduct of the campaign is marked by two outstanding personal characteristics : a complete confidence in himself—" *je commande seul* "—and the clearest appreciation that the British squadron was the real barrier to success. This had been his view in the West Indies, contrary to the accepted doctrine of the then reigning French school of thought. " The only way to achieve success," he had said after the repulse at *St. Lucia*, " is vigourously to attack the squadron. Their troops, lacking everything in a bad country, will be obliged to surrender." Yet on this occasion, for the second time, he called a Council of War, at which he defined the landing of the troops as the primary immediate object. It is permissible to conjecture—though conjecture only it can be—that it was not lack of confidence in himself that caused him to call upon his captain for their opinions, but lack of confidence in them, caused by their undisciplined behaviour at *Mauritius*.

At this meeting Suffren pointed out that the enemy was in a position with resources close at hand for repair ; that ships at anchor, which have only their guns to attend to, are at an advantage over ships under way ; that the fortress guns could assist the squadron. In such a situation, he concluded, the principal object of the moment became the disembarkation of the army and it was with that that a beginning should be made.<sup>1</sup>

The Captains, with the exception of *M. St. Felix* who recommended attacking, agreed that to attack the British, situated as they were, would be to throw away the numerical advantage he possessed. If any mishap occurred, such as may occur in a sea-fight, the troopships would be unprotected. On the other hand, once the troops were ashore, even though the French squadron should be beaten in a later engagement,

<sup>1</sup> *Cunat, Vie de Suffren*, p. 101.



they would be a substantial aid to Hyder ; for three thousand or so troops in India, where the strength of armies was measurable mainly by the number of Europeans, formed very respectable reinforcement. Freed from the burden of protecting the troops, the squadron would be at liberty to undertake whatever operations should be considered proper to force a battle. Mahan,<sup>1</sup> in his discussion of Suffren's decision, implies that the refusal to fight was due to the certainty that Suffren could force Hughes to fight in defence of Trincomali or of any port in the mainland at which a landing might be attempted. There is, however, nothing in the terms in which he stated his reasons against attacking which imply that any such consideration was in his mind ; nor indeed was he yet aware of the weakness of the garrison of that place. Further, when once he should have landed the army on the coast, he would possess no force whatever with which he could threaten Trincomali, for the troops would no longer be at his disposal. His justification lies rather in the acknowledged strength of a well anchored fleet supported by batteries, lying in a roadstead with a strong current, with light and variable winds ; the same reasons which governed Hughes in not attacking a similarly inferior force off Trincomali in the following September.

Having thus settled his movements, Suffren weighed soon after noon and made sail for Pondicherry with the object of getting information,<sup>2</sup> and steering well to seaward of Madras Roads. Hughes remained for the time at anchor. He intended to fight but he wished to make sure of getting the wind of the enemy in order to engage closely. When he saw them well on their way to the southward he weighed and stood after them, hauling his wind to a north-east breeze to get the weather gage. Suffren, observing this, did the same, in order not to be leeward at dawn, but his transports

<sup>1</sup> *Influence and Sea Power on History*, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> "A une heure, la brise s'étant levée, j'ai appareillé pour prendre langue à Pondicherry." Suffren to de Souillac, March 12th, 1782.

kept inshore : and the continuation of these movements brought about a wide gap between the French escort and its convoy.<sup>1</sup>

Touch between the British and French was lost after dark. Hughes altered course to the southward, and the *Fine*, which had been ordered to report his movements, failed to observe this change. The result was that while the French main body kept to windward, the convoy stood direct for Pondicherry, and daylight found Hughes between them with the squadron some twelve miles off, bearing east, and the sixteen transports nine miles to the south-west. He at once decided to attack the transports, "well knowing the enemy's line of battleships would follow to protect them all in their power." The *Monmouth*, *Isis* and *Seahorse* were detached and quickly stretched ahead in pursuit of the transports, the rest of the squadron crowding all sail but keeping in company. Six prizes were quickly taken, five of them being captured British ships and the sixth a transport, the *Lauriston*, carrying 300 troops and a quantity of important military stores. The *Seahorse*, which took two of them, was roughly handled and beaten off by two other armed transports. The rest of the convoy scattered. One ran to Negapatam, four to Tranquebar and others to Galle and Pondicherry.

Meanwhile Suffren, under a press of sail, uncertain whether the ships he first saw were his convoy or the British, hastened after Hughes. By three in the afternoon four of the fastest French ships had come within three or four miles of the sternmost of the British. Hughes then signalled the general recall, and at nightfall, having gathered his squadron together, he stood to the south-east under an easy sail. Suffren, having come up to within about three miles a little

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Souillac, March 12th, 1782. Cunat states that the impression in the squadron was that Hughes intended to return to Madras : but Suffren's despatch not only says nothing of this, but definitely states that his movement to windward was for the object stated above. It was realised that Hughes might follow the French squadron : and Suffren put out his lights in order that his squadron's position should not be observed.

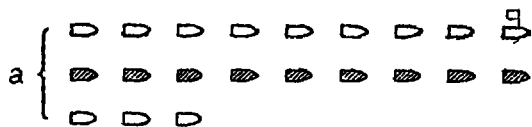
earlier, brought to in order to collect his ships which also had become scattered : he then stood after Hughes in order to keep touch and engage at daylight.

At daylight on the 17th, with the wind at N.N.E., the French squadron was dead to windward, about six or seven miles<sup>1</sup> distant. The wind was squally and the French squadron getting the squalls first came up fast. Hughes had formed line, and for a short time, in the hope of recovering the weather gage, hauled his wind to the east; but his ships not being well locked up, he bore up and stood to leeward, his outer ships closing on his centre.

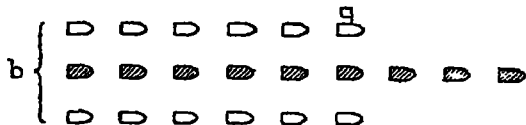
Suffren had signalled his squadron to form line, but it was not yet formed when he got contact. He ordered his van division composed of his fastest ships—those coppered—to press on in the order of the speed of their sailing, and attack the rear of the British line. He had expressed his intentions in the following terms to his second in command, “If we are fortunate enough to have the wind of the enemy, as they number eight or nine at the most, my plan is to double on their rear. Supposing your division to be in the rear, you will see from your position what number of ships overlap the line and you will order them to double.” Further sentences had outlined the action to be taken if the French were to leeward, when they were to double by tacking. His final sentence to his second in command resembled the words of Nelson to Collingwood. “Finally, in all cases, I beg you will give orders to your division to make any movements which you consider best to assure the success of the battle.”

Pressing thus on, Suffren approached Hughes, who with the light wind could do nothing to avoid accepting action under the disadvantageous conditions of inferior numbers, the lee position and the insufficient wind to manœuvre. He therefore prepared for the attack which he expected would be delivered in the traditional way from van to rear. But it was not.

<sup>1</sup> Cunat, 1½ leagues. *Journal de Bord*, 2 leagues. Hughes, 3 leagues.

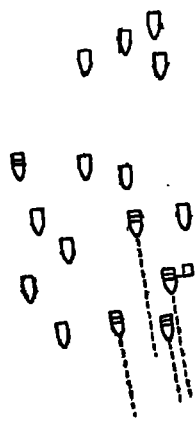


(a) *The attack as contemplated in the instructions, with the surplus ships doubling on the rear.*




(b) *The attack as intended to develop when Suffren brought up at the sixth ship, Tromelin doubling with the other division.*

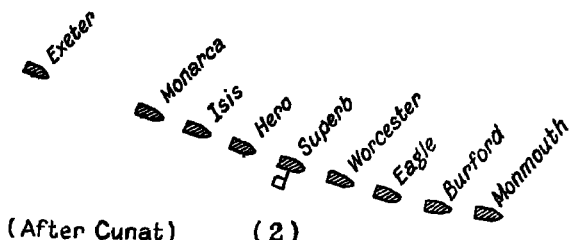
(1)



Time - 3 P.M.

*The French squadron standing down in an unformed state which appeared to Hughes as a double line abreast. The British bringing to receive them.*

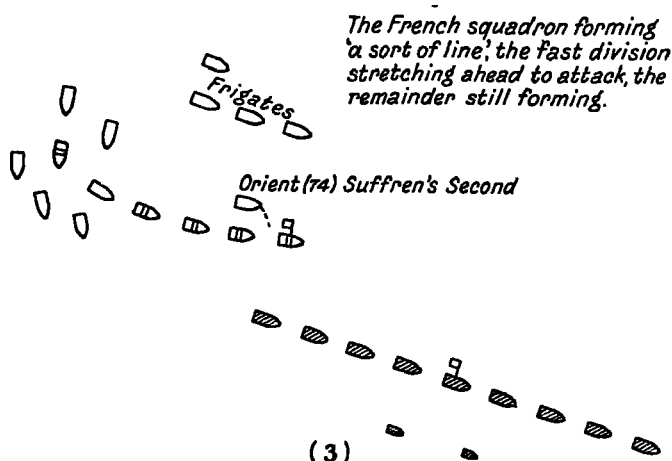
*French ships marked thus  are coppered.*



(After Cunit)

(2)

Suffren, on reaching the tail of the British line in what he called "a sort of line," engaged the Exeter which was somewhat astern of the line and followed along the line, firing successively at each ship until he came abreast the British flagship. He was followed by his next four ships which successively engaged the Exeter and then took up their positions abreast their respective numbers in the British line. Hughes, in one of his despatches, makes a remark which is not without its interest as affording some insight into his outlook. "Mr. Suffrain led the van of his own ships,



but instead of leading up the line to the van of ours and giving a generous opportunity to his companions to display the great superiority of his force, he determined to render it still more efficacious by stopping short at our Admiral ship followed by several more which supported him and also engaged with the four sternmost of ours." . . . There seems to be a curious note of resentment in this, a suggestion that his opponent had not played quite fair, and had not displayed the chivalry which the conduct of war demands. This limitation of his tactical sense and outlook in war is a factor not without its influence on his acts later.

Thus far all was well for Suffren's plan and it only remained for Tromelin to do his duty. There was an overlap of no less than seven ships. Not only had his instructions told the Commodore to double on the rear and engage, but Suffren signalled to him to do so. But he did nothing. He kept his wind and remained on the weather quarter of the sternmost of the five engaged French ships. The three ships astern of him followed his example, with the honourable exception of the *Flamand*, who, disregarding the Commodore's inaction, pushed down and engaged the *Exeter* to leeward. The *Artésien*, a coppered ship which should have been able to do the same, remained to windward and astern. The *Brillant* later passed under the *Exeter*'s lee and engaged her.

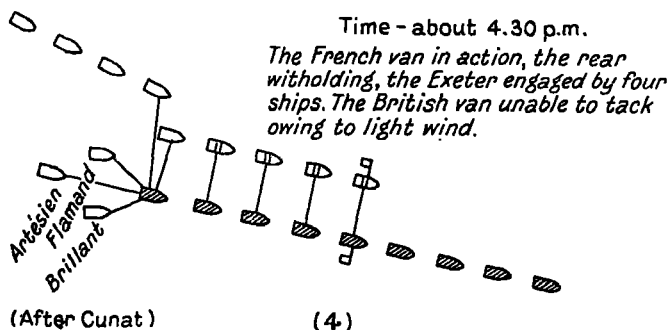
Thus the net result was that the five ships in the British rear were engaged by eight of the enemy, of whom no less than four concentrated on the *Exeter* while the four leading British ships were not engaged; and although Hughes had the signal ready for them to tack, the wind was so light that they could not get round and thus remained inactive throughout the battle. Nor, if they had tacked, as Hughes remarks, could the centre and rear, heavily engaged and much damaged aloft as they were, have followed "without an almost complete certainty of separating our van from our rear." The remaining five French ships were also inactive; but in their case there was no excuse for not engaging. For the wind was enough to bring them into action going large, though not enough to give ships the way necessary to go about.

The battle thus joined continued until nearly dark when a squall from the south-east paid the heads of the leading British ships off the wind, and in the mist, wind and darkness that followed the engagement was broken off though—in Hughes's opinion—it was still within the enemy's power to continue action: for they still had the wind.

What, precisely, was Suffren's intention, and was the misconduct of the Commodore due in any way to want of clearness in his instructions? Were the instructions so

worded as to leave no doubt in Tromelin's head as to his Chief's intentions, so that however the situation might arise, he could be in no doubt as to how he should act?

Unless there were—of which there is no record—any conversations which expanded the instructions, the wording would leave the impression that Suffren's first intention was to engage in the ordinary way, ship to ship from van to rear, and to double with the surplus or overlap; and that he left to Tromelin the adjustment of the doubling force. This appears to be corroborated by the fact that three ships only were actually signalled to pass to leeward—the *Annibal*, *Ajax* and *Flamand*.<sup>1</sup> But Suffren did not pass to the head



of the line. He stopped at the fifth from the van. It is within the bounds of possibility that Tromelin, expecting the whole enemy line was to be engaged, was in doubt as to what to do and expected the flagship to move further ahead to the van. But if he did so expect, the question could hardly remain long in suspense, for the *Héros* remained definitely abreast the *Superb*; and Tromelin had seven ships with which to do what he chose. The last sentence of his instructions left him a perfect liberty of action to take the whole of the remaining ships to engage the enemy to leeward, or to send or take such number as he thought

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de Bord*, p. 96; *Chevalier*, p. 391. Troude says *Ajax* and *Flamand* only had the order.

fit, and close in to pistol shot to windward of the rearmost British ships. Which would have been the better course to take it is not possible to say ; but that he should and could have taken the one or the other course is beyond a shadow of doubt. Nor can there be the smallest question that when his own ship, the *Ajax* and the *Flamand* were signalled to double, his conduct in not doing so himself, and deliberately recalling the *Ajax* when she started to obey, was nothing short of rank disobedience.

Tromelin's conduct thus admits of no excuse. But did Suffren himself do all that was needed to guard against the possibility of misinterpretation of his intentions ? Were his instructions so framed that a willing subordinate would grasp without hesitation how he should act and an ill-conditioned one would have difficulty in evading his duty ?

For a willing and intelligent man the instructions provided all that he should need. Even if, expecting Suffren to proceed to the head of the line, he should have locked close up to engage the ships in turn, then to find that Suffren brought abreast the *Superb*, such a man would have ordered or led such a number of ships as the situation called for round the rear to engage to leeward. Some slight delay owing to the change in the leader's plan there might have been, but no more : while the numbers he would send would clearly be determined by whether he would more quickly or more effectively employ some of them to windward. But all men are not able ; and willingness is not a sufficient substitute for ability, as the gallant Carkett's action in Rodney's battle was to show ; and we know what Suffren thought of the spirit of the commanding officers with whom he had made acquaintance at Mauritius. He had formed a poor opinion of their military spirit and having as yet little experience of their seamanlike qualities in manœuvring he was taking a risk in entrusting to such men the conduct of an attack the form of which, being novel, required both



a high spirit and professional skill. He blamed his captains for the failure to exploit to the full the opportunity that he had so successfully put into their hands. But it is not possible to absolve him from some blame, even though his action may have proceeded from ardour and a generous belief in the loyalty and capacity of his officers. Though we may well hope that such conduct as that of the captains in the rear will never be repeated—not forgetting the disgraceful British precedent off Toulon in 1744—the incident emphasises the importance of no pains being spared by a superior to make his intentions fully known, and to assure himself that they are understood. Foch has most truly said, “It is not enough to make good plans. . . . To make oneself understood, it is necessary to explain—to write or speak at length. Silence, laconicism, are not sufficient for command *except when no demand has to be made upon the subordinate spirits.*”

Although the high hopes that Suffren had justifiably entertained of a crushing victory had thus been disappointed in the action of the afternoon, there still remained the possibility of renewing the action on the morrow. For what reason he did not take the essential steps to enable him to do so—that is, by keeping touch with the enemy—it is not possible to say. He had frigates with which touch could have been kept: his own injuries aloft were too slight—his squadron had lost two topmasts only—to prevent his keeping touch. In one of his letters,<sup>1</sup> he states that when he broke off the engagement in consequence of night, the changeable wind and the rain, and still more the failure to execute his orders, he did so in the hope of resuming the action next day. But he did not make any corresponding dispositions of his frigates. In another letter<sup>2</sup> of the same day, he says that on the following morning his shortage of water, his need to rejoin his convoy and to confer with

<sup>1</sup> To de Castries, March 12th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> To de Souillac, March 12th, 1782.

Hyder, prevented him from pursuing the enemy. Yet he had every possible reason to desire to fight them again with the least delay, for he knew, from the information he had obtained from the Hannibal, that they might be joined by two more ships. Any postponement favoured the chance that the British would be reinforced before he could again engage them. Certainly, once touch was lost with Hughes, a search for him might fail, for Hughes might have gone either to Madras or Trincomali; and Suffren's water was low. As things therefore stood on the morning of the 16th, there were practical reasons for not seeking for him; but this would not have arisen if the French admiral had taken steps to keep touch after breaking off the fight. The guess may be hazarded that, in the tempest of wrath and disappointment which any man would feel at such a frustration of his plans but which would be doubly strong in the case of a man of so impetuous and fiery a temperament as Suffren, he did not think of doing so. That this was a grievous error not even his greatest admirers, of whom the writer is one, can think of denying.

Thus the French squadron proceeded to Pondicherry. There Suffren learned that Hyder wished his troops to be landed at Porto Novo. Thither, therefore, he shaped course, anchoring on the 21st. He proceeded at once to water his ships—a slow process owing to the lack of facilities—land his troops, embark provisions, and confer with Hyder. Those of his scattered convoy which had gone to Tranquebar soon rejoined him. The step he next intended to take was to go to Galle to collect those transports and store ships which had sought refuge there. The disembarkation, watering and conversations occupied many days during which he was chafing at the thought that every day's delay was decreasing his chance of meeting Hughes again before he was reinforced. An undoubted opportunity had been lost by his failure to pursue.

Hughes, when darkness and the squall brought the action

to an end, took his squadron with the dismasted Exeter in tow to Trincomali to effect repairs in the smooth water, where he could heel and plug his shot holes under water. His losses were thirty-two killed and a hundred and five wounded<sup>1</sup>—practically the same as those of the French, who lost about thirty killed and a hundred wounded. The Superb and Exeter had suffered most, the former with neither brace nor bowline left and five feet of water in the hold, the latter, almost a complete wreck—a condition which should have rendered both keeping touch and pursuit possible to the French if steps had been taken for so doing; for it took Hughes eight days to reach his port. This would even have given the practically undamaged French squadron time to look into Madras or to overhaul him before his ships reached Trincomali. Very fortunate it now proved that Hughes's advice in the previous October had prevailed and that this secure anchorage was in British hands. There, in the brief space of a week, he refitted, and then boldly returned to Madras, arriving on March 9th. He was, however, able to leave a small reinforcement to the garrison, for General Medows, who had remained on board with him, was so impressed with the importance, and the weakness, of the place, and further by the news that the Dutch had now a large body of troops in march from Jaffna to attack it, that he landed two officers and fifty men to strengthen it: an action which was subsequently disapproved by General Coote.

At Madras Hughes found the situation on land still bad. Though Coote had defeated Hyder in three actions and

<sup>1</sup> Superb	.	.	.	.	killed 11	wounded 25
Exeter	.	.	.	.	" 10	" 55
Hero	.	.	.	.	" 9	" 17
Monarca	.	.	.	.	" 1	" 5
Isis	.	.	.	.	" 1	" 3
					<hr/> 32	<hr/> 105

had relieved Vellore, Hyder still held firm possession of the greater part of the Carnatic, Coote's army could not move beyond the Mount, 3,000 French troops had been landed at Porto Novo, a great number of the badly needed grain vessels had been destroyed, and, the revenues of the Carnatic being stopped, the army was short of pay and in danger of mutiny. More than ever did it become essential to obtain peace with the Mahrattas. Fortunately there was some slight reason for hope that this might come about, for Scindia had broken away from the Confederacy. This was the single ray of hope in a dark situation.

Hughes's intentions as to his next move, as expressed to Macartney on his arrival, were "to attack the squadron if by position I can bring them to an equal combat, to compleat the stores and provisions of the squadron, to receive such reinforcements as may be sent me from England, and to cover the arrival of our transports that may hourly be expected from Bombay, and if possible keep open the communications with Bengal. These are my present objects."<sup>1</sup>

The transports to which Hughes here refers were those which had been left behind at the Morabat Gulf by Alms. These ships had followed Alms with all despatch, and reaching Bombay on January 22nd had provisioned and watered with great energy and sailed six days later for Anjengo, as their instructions directed. On arrival there on February 9th they had learned of the appearance of Suffren on the other coast. Colonel Humberstone, who commanded the troops, and Captain Smith of the escort, decided not to advance into a zone of such obvious danger; but in order to be of some immediate service Humberstone sailed next day for Calicut to pick up some troops there and attack Cochin. Both Hughes and Coote approved this action (February 15th). But a month later, the battle of February 17th having been fought in the interval

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Macartney, March 9th, 1782.

and Coote particularly desiring to concentrate as much force as possible in the Carnatic, Coote and Hughes sent a joint letter containing a "positive order" to these officers to re-embark the troops and bring them to the east coast; telling them at the same time that the squadron would meet between the Basses and Trincomali.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Hughes's first intention in March had been to ensure the safe passage of the transports from Bombay and to meet his two ships of the line. But on March 26th he heard that Suffren had left Porto Novo for the southward, and fearing that this meant an attack upon Trincomali, he pressed again for a reinforcement for the garrison, for embarkation on board the squadron. This he now succeeded in obtaining, though it was but a small one: and he sailed on the 28th with the intention of going direct to Trincomali, landing his troops and then taking up a cruising station off Ceylon to meet the ships expected from Anjengo.

At dawn next day a fleet was sighted to the southward. Hughes pushed out his frigates to identify the strangers and stood towards them. To his great relief they proved to be the expected convoy escorted by the *Magnanime* and *Sultan*. Sending the merchant ships into Madras, then some thirty miles to leeward (about W.N.W.), and joining the two ships of the line to his squadron, he proceeded towards Trincomali. But great as his satisfaction was that this valuable convoy had escaped capture by Suffren, who, with good luck on his part, might well have intercepted it, it was tempered by the grievous condition in which he found the crews of his reinforcement. Scurvy was raging on board them and the many sick must be landed as soon as possible, and it was thus only two seriously undermanned ships that joined him. His intentions at this moment, altered as

<sup>1</sup> The reason for this categorical imperative was that Mr. Sullivan the President in Tanjore, as previously described, had taken upon himself in February to assume powers of direction over the naval and military forces. *Ad.* 7, 755. Correspondence with Fort St. George.

they were by the arrival of the convoy and the conditions of the ships of the reinforcement, were to throw the reinforcements and stores into Trincomali, and land his sick from the *Sultan* and *Magnanime* before Suffren could attack "without either seeking or shunning the enemy": and, having completed that task, "to go in quest of the enemy's squadron."<sup>1</sup>

While Hughes was thus deciding upon his course of action, Suffren, engaged in disembarking his army, was similarly considering the situation. He was determined at all costs to remain on the coast, notwithstanding the unexpected position in which he found himself with Trincomali in the enemy's hands. His power to remain would depend largely upon supplies. Already he was feeling the need of stores, particularly cordage, and of men. For he was now 600 short of complement.<sup>2</sup> His needs were to some extent met as he lay off Porto Novo by the happy arrival of a convoy from Mauritius<sup>3</sup> bringing him stores, spars and some seamen. How then should he proceed? What was the situation, and what should he aim at doing?

Hughes, he had learned, had returned to Madras; but whether he had been able to refit his disabled ships and bring them with him, and whether he had been joined by the *Sultan* and *Magnanime*, Suffren did not know. A report had been received on March 19th that these two ships had reached Madras—a report which was incorrect, for as we have seen they did not join Hughes until the 30th, nor did they go into Madras at all. But to Suffren it thus appeared that the British squadron was now nearly equal to his own. Several of his transports, which had been scattered in the engagement of the 17th, were still missing and lay far away at Galle. In this situation he decided that his first step must be to recover these vessels in order to get all the army on to the field with the least delay, and with that

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Macartney, March 30th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to de Souillac, March 12th, 1782.

<sup>3</sup> Trublet, p. 56. How many men is not mentioned.

object he sailed from Porto Novo on March 23rd, intending to go towards the South of Ceylon, get touch with them, and bring them back to the coast.<sup>1</sup>

Next, what should he do afterwards ? Much as he regarded the capture of a base—Trincomali—as an object of the highest importance and most essential to his later operations, he did not feel able at present to attempt it : for he did not possess the necessary troops, nor could he obtain any except from the military commander, M. Duchemin. How many he would need was again uncertain, for he had no precise information of the strength of the garrison. If that should prove weak he considered that the resources of the squadron, strengthened by the troops in the missing transports, might be enough for a *coup de main*, but he feared that if once those troops should have been landed in India, he would never see them again. Clearly, information was what he needed : and he wrote to the Governor of Colombo begging him to send all he had and asking whether, if he should attack Trincomali, the Dutch could assist with troops from their forces in Ceylon.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the capture of Trincomali there were other possibilities open to him. "I might," he wrote to de Souillac, "try to retake Trincomali : or I might attack the settlements in Sumatra or those to the northward of Madras except Masulipatam ; and, according to circumstances, go up the Ganges." All these direct blows were, however, dependent upon a victory over Hughes ; and after passing the various courses in review, he ends his note with the firm clear words "but in the end no plan can possibly be made until I have had a second action with the English squadron."

One thing he would not do, although in not doing it he was committing a clear breach of the King's orders. He would not return to the Islands. He had received instructions directing him to leave the coast in March and take the

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Souillac, March 27th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to M. Falck, March 12th and 26th, 1782.

squadron back to Mauritius to refit and strengthen, and to return to the coast in April. This course he considered to be utterly out of the question. It would mean an absence of 160 days and what, he asked, would the enemy be doing all that time? What would be the effect on Hyder, to whom he had assured his unqualified and continued support? What would not Hyder say—would he not consider February 17th as an enemy victory? and would not all the Country Powers on the coast believe him? Putting a proper interpretation upon orders issued under different supposititious conditions, he rightly ignored them. “I take this step, though the only right one, with regret; for it will please no one and will be disapproved by all.” For he not only had to face the results of disobedience if any mishap occurred, but also the recriminations of his officers who were longing to exchange the rigours of the Coromandel coast for the pleasures of Port Louis.

While the sea commanders were thus considering their future plans and movements, other plans were being proposed on land which, if they had been put into execution, would have been of material assistance to the British squadron. In the early months of the year General Mathews had conducted a campaign with troops from Bombay on the Malabar coast. Successful at first, Mathews had been forced eventually by superior force to retire to Calicut. The Calcutta Government, which never wavered in its desire to develop a strong diversion in Malabar in order to weaken Hyder in the Carnatic, had ordered the General to make the greatest effort possible: and of this the Bombay Government was fully aware. But such was the localised and perverted spirit in that Presidency that although it was then in no danger from the Mahrattas, though there were troops in ample numbers under Goddard at Bombay and shipping withal to carry them, the Council deliberately, on March 31st, recalled Mathews. With Goddard's reinforcement an offensive could have been reopened, the result of which



could hardly have failed to oblige Hyder, whose communications would have been endangered, to retire from the Carnatic, as it caused his son Tippoo to do in the following year. Indeed, his correspondence clearly shows how greatly he feared a strong attack on his own dominions from the Malabar quarter. The small French force in the Carnatic would then have been isolated in a very awkward position. Hastings, greatly indignant at this behaviour of the Bombay Council, in reproaching them for their conduct indicated the important results which compliance with his instructions would have produced at sea. "The French," he wrote, "must have followed him (Hyder) or have been left in Cuddalore isolated and become prisoners. The effect of this would be felt at sea. Suffren, who could only man his fleet, after repeated bloody actions, from the land troops, would have been defeated and obliged to retire to the islands."

But Bombay could only see things through Bombay spectacles. Goddard could not be spared, for the Mahratta War must be continued else they would run the risk of losing their recently acquired conquests, with their resources. In a reply, written later (October 1782), Hastings cuttingly reminded them that in this war "it is not the choice of advantageous measures, but of such as vary in difficulty, that is before us. It is not the future embarrassment of your resources, but the immediate and best application of those you actually possess that should influence your operations." It would be of little satisfaction, he caustically remarked, to have preserved some territories outside Bombay which could at any time be invaded, if Madras and the coast settlements were lost. He reminded them of their very different conduct in 1768, when Bombay, with little territory and but a small army, reduced Mangalore, "an event which immediately drew Hyder from opposing our arms in the heart of his possessions to recover a port which he saw would place us within reach of his capital with every

support which we could derive from the sea. When Calicut was taken he began upon the same principle of apprehension to treat immediately with Sir Eyre Coote. But when he found out the line you had adopted—and the knowledge of your Councils is quick—his apprehension vanished and left him to attend the operations of his new allies in his favour.”

While military operations were being discussed in this manner on the broad scale, the French who had landed at Porto Novo in February had opened their campaign. So soon as their troops were recovered from the voyage and the army in a condition to move, they marched, in co-operation with a strong body of Tippoo's forces, from Porto Novo on Cuddalore. The news of the attack on this important position reached Madras after Hughes had sailed to the south. Troops were quickly embarked on board two transports and despatched coastwise to the relief of the town. They arrived too late. Cuddalore fell on April 3rd, and the French were thereby put in possession of an anchorage of great value, more convenient for the embarkation of supplies than Madras, in consequence of the sheltered river into which the boats could come. With the whole district in their hands, the squadron could now be supplied from the resources of the country which the Mysorean forces had at their disposal. Without Cuddalore Suffren could not have remained on the coast. His nearest base must have been Batticaloa.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BATTLE OF APRIL 12TH, 1782

THE first week of April 1782 saw the French and English squadrons, which had left Madras and Porto Novo on March 23rd and 28th respectively, proceeding down the Coromandel coast, each Admiral in ignorance of the other's movement. The immediate object of the French Admiral was to recover his missing transports from Galle, that of the British to reinforce Trincomali with the least possible delay and to land and recuperate his numerous sick, particularly those in his two most recently joined ships. Each Admiral intended, so soon as he should have fulfilled this particular duty, to try conclusions with the enemy.

The two squadrons worked down the coast inshore, delayed by light and variable winds and a northerly current of rather more than a knot. When Suffren reached the offing of Negapatam he cruised in that part for a week, delaying his passage, it may be, in hopes of intercepting the Bombay convoy which he knew was due but of whose arrival at Madras he was not certain: though, as we have seen, he had received rumours—actually incorrect—that it had done so. This delay brought up the British squadron which had sailed a week later, and thus it came about that on the afternoon of April 8th, when Suffren was resuming his movement towards Batticaloa, one of his transports, which was astern of the main body and had been detached from it on a separate mission, sighted the British squadron astern and to the northward. She promptly proceeded to rejoin Suffren to give him the information which reached the Admiral shortly before midnight. Suffren at once altered course back to the N.N.E<sup>d</sup>, and at daylight next morning

the French squadron was in sight from the British masts, approaching in the south-west quarter and to leeward, the wind being north-east.

Hughes had now to decide what to do. His correspondence and his movements during the next three days leave no doubt that that which dominated his mind was the security of Trincomali: that he regarded as the principal object of the moment to get his reinforcement into the fortress. We have seen how the weakness of the garrison had been his constant anxiety, how he had pressed the Government for additional troops ever since he had obtained possession of the place. Nothing was more deeply impressed upon his mind than that if he were worsted in an engagement with the superior forces of the enemy, Trincomali would fall like a ripe fruit into the hands of the French, who had not only the forces of the squadron at their disposal but might be expected to receive further help on land from the Dutch at Jaffna, the capture of which fortress both Munro and he had advocated for the security of Trincomali in the first instance—advice which had been rejected.

We know well how often in war both statesmen and commanders form exaggerated notions of danger, and of the tendency to make provision against supposititious offensive enemy action which that enemy has never contemplated. Was this the case with Hughes? Were his fears for Trincomali exaggerated?

We have seen that Suffren had given thought to the matter while he lay at Porto Novo, and the correspondence which passed between the Dutch Governor of Colombo, M. Falck, and the French Commander makes clear the reality of the danger to Trincomali. Directly M. Falck had received news of the arrival of the French squadron on the coast in February he had written to Suffren to urge him to make an attack upon Trincomali and to convince him of the ease with which the recapture could be effected. The garrison was both weak and discontented: a strong detachment

could be sent from Jaffna to assist the forces of the squadron, and the superior French squadron in the Bay would effectively prevent interference by the British.<sup>1</sup> This letter crossed the one from Suffren asking for information of the place and saying that, if means were available, its capture would be of the highest importance:<sup>2</sup> while Falck, in anticipation, had sent orders to Jaffna to hold a detachment of Malay troops in readiness to march on Trincomali as soon as information should be received of an impending French attack.<sup>3</sup>

Suffren, when he sailed from Porto Novo, had received the first of these letters, but though he possessed as yet no exact knowledge of the strength of the garrison or of the state of its defences he had enough to have formed the opinion that he would probably have sufficient force to take it when he had recovered his transports from Galle, and had the help of troops from Jaffna. Duchemin had concurred in the troops and artillery being used in this service. In the meantime, Falck had heard of his departure from Porto Novo, and had given orders for the troops—100 white and 300 sepoys—which were ready in accordance with his instructions, to set out towards Trincomali,<sup>4</sup> and this force actually arrived within two days' march of Trincomali on April 11th. "Never," wrote the Governor, "would the moment be more favourable for an attack. Pagoda Hill would probably surrender without firing a shot, while Ostenburg, manned by a garrison composed of Swiss mercenaries and discontented and discouraged sepoys, would certainly never expose itself to the penalties of being taken by assault."

Although this letter did not reach Suffren before the subsequent battle, he learned from another source, on

<sup>1</sup> Falck to Suffren, February 28th, 1782. Received March 23rd. *Colombo Archives.*

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to Falck, March 12th, 1782. *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Falck to Suffren, March 14th, 1782. *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Falck to Suffren, April 5th, 1782.

April 10th, that which he desired to know about the strength of the garrison. On that day he captured a vessel carrying an envoy, Mr. Boyd, who was returning from a mission to Kandy, and with him he took, owing to unpardonable carelessness, all the papers and despatches in Boyd's possession. These gave Suffren exactly what he wanted. He learned from them that the garrison consisted of no more than sixty white troops and 450 sepoys of little fighting value, and that the defences were in a poor condition. With this information, and with the assurance he already had that assistance from Jaffna would be forthcoming, he needed only to obtain a sufficient advantage over the British squadron to compel it to withdraw temporarily from that part and assure the capture of this highly important position. "If the English again commit the imprudence," wrote Suffren a little later to Falck, "of leaving Trincomali with such a weak garrison as there was there, or even a stronger one, I might with your help make an attempt to recover it as soon as I have been rejoined by my convoy."

Thus it is just to say that Hughes's anxieties were not caused by his making those "pictures" against which we are warned. They were a correct interpretation of the results of a reverse at sea.

How, then, should he act when he found his eleven ships, in the state in which he knew them to be, in face of the twelve of the enemy? Certainly, a defeat of the French squadron would afford the most complete defence of Trincomali; and he was at this moment in possession of the weather gage. To form any reasoned opinion as to the rightness of his decision, or to draw any legitimate lessons from the event, it is necessary to place oneself, so far as it is possible to do so, in Hughes's place, and see the situation as we may imagine he saw it.

When Hughes sailed from Madras, his nine ships were over 600 short of complement, although their crews had been strengthened by 200 men of the 98th Regiment. He had

since been joined by the *Magnanime* and *Sultan*. These ships had just completed a voyage of over five months, in which they had suffered first from fever at Johanna, then from lack of water on the Arabian coast, and finally from scurvy in a raging form. They were, in Hughes's words, "more like hospital ships than men-of-war." How many sick they had on board is not recorded, but the figures of sick after the action on the 12th are eloquent. On the day immediately after the battle he wrote saying that the scurvy had made such terrible progress, and the stench on board was so appalling, that to prevent further spread of contagion and save the lives of the most afflicted, he had detached a ship with 400 sick to Trincomali: and when a week later he arrived there with the squadron he landed 1,462 sick and wounded men.

Thus, when he sighted the twelve ships of the enemy to leeward, the problem which one may suppose presented itself to him was how, with a force of eleven ships, nine of them short of complement and the other two even more grievously weakened by death and disease, he should proceed to achieve the object which, rightly or wrongly, he had adopted—that of getting his reinforcements into Trincomali—in face of the opposition of twelve ships of the enemy, of whose internal condition and of whose losses in the recent battle he knew nothing. While he had no reason to suppose that they were not efficiently manned he had every possible reason to assume that none were in the crippled condition of his last two recruits.

There is little doubt in the present writer's mind that Hughes's reading of the situation was that he was facing the twelve ships of the enemy not with eleven effective ships of his own, but with nine; and those nine themselves individually inferior in personnel to the enemy. He had two courses of action open to him. One, to attack this superior squadron and force his way into Trincomali; the other to circumvent it. What prospects of successfully achieving

the object he had in view would these alternative courses appear to present ?

To force his way in he must defeat the enemy who lay directly in his path. A defeat of that enemy could result only from superiority in some form : tactical skill, technical skill, or personal or individual skill, which singly or in combination, would counterbalance the superior numbers in ships, and their supposed superiority in numbers and health of the personnel.

Hughes was not a man of original tactical ideas. All of his fighting makes it clear that he was simply a man of his time whose tactical doctrine was summed up in a well-locked-up line of battle with his strongest ships massed in the centre. His remarks on Suffren's concentration on the British rear on February 17th convey the impression that he thought there was something almost unchivalrous in this excellent application of the doctrine of economy of force. He saw no way, nor had he conveyed to his captains any plan, for concentrating upon a part of the enemy ; by which means alone an inferior can be transformed into a superior force. Tactical means of creating superiority out of inferiority he did not possess. How far his meeting with Suffren on February 17th had enabled him to form an estimate of the skill of the French Captains cannot be said. He makes no mention of their ill behaviour in his letters, and there is no reason to suppose that he had any evidence which could give him confidence of a superiority in this respect sufficient to outbalance the numerical superiority of the enemy. He was still many miles from Trincomali, and he may well have thought that if he fought closer to his port he would be better able to reach security in case of a reverse, as the Dutch so often had done in the North Sea in the old wars. He had said that he would attack the enemy "*if by position, I can bring them to an equal combat.*" It may fairly be supposed that he saw no way of producing that desired equality in a deliberate attack.

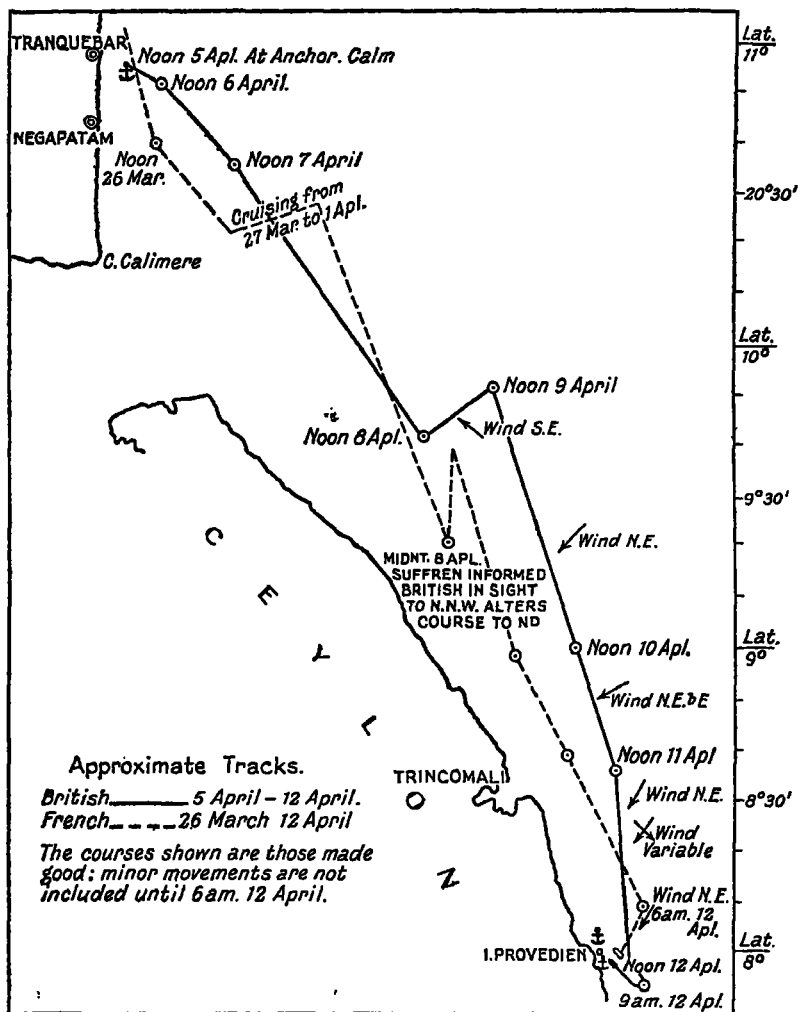


Get into Trincomali he must, for to return to Madras spelt the certain loss of his indispensable base. The alternatives to fighting his way in by attacking where he then was were either to circumvent the enemy, to improve his position by drawing the enemy in pursuit in the hopes of engaging him in Horatian detail, or to outsail the French squadron and slip into Trincomali across their track.

Judging by his movements of the next two days, this last is what he decided to do. It offered greater prospects of success than fighting against odds where he then was. Once Trincomali was rendered secure and his sickly crews restored to health he could act as he had said he would, and as at a later time he did; and seek the enemy. In the meantime to fight at a disadvantage when by postponement that disadvantage would be reduced, was not only to risk a reverse but the loss of the British possessions in India. Suffren had taken a not dissimilar course when with twelve ships he found Hughes with only nine off Madras. Notwithstanding his superiority on that occasion he did not attack Hughes, for the reason that a reverse might ruin his campaign. He likewise had stood on to land his troops—he had regarded as his principal object to get them ashore. So too Howe, with his thirty-four ships when engaged in throwing reinforcements into Gibraltar in the face of the Spanish forty-six, did not force a battle but outmanœuvred the enemy and landed his troops and stores. There is, indeed, not much mathematical difference between the proportion of nine to twelve and thirty-four to forty-six: and if allowance be made, as it must be made, for the two desperately sickly ships, so too there is a further allowance to be made for the difference between the efficiency of the seamen of France and Spain in 1782.

This attempt to reconstruct the situation as Hughes saw it is, clearly, conjecture only; but it is conjecture based upon the facts as they were and as he knew them, his known intentions, his views as to the vital importance

of Trincomali, and the actual course of action he pursued. There was obviously a risk that the attempt might fail.



MOVEMENTS LEADING UP TO THE BATTLE OF APRIL 12TH, 1782.

Still, it had a reasonable prospect of success, and that prospect may have appeared to him greater than that of an attack on a force which he regarded as so superior to his own.

Whether in fact and reality it was so superior we need not here discuss ; for his decision could only be taken upon his own view of the relative strength of the opposing squadrons.

Thus, Hughes pursued his course. Throughout April 9th he stood steadily on to the S.S.E., with the enemy about fifteen to eighteen miles to leeward. At daylight on the 10th the enemy was still to the south-westward, but the breezes favouring the British they dropped the French yet further astern during the day. By noon on the 11th, the British squadron had reached the latitude of Trincomali well ahead of the French ; and a little later Hughes bore up and set his studding sails to make the harbour, at the same time beating to quarters to receive the enemy if he should not succeed in passing him. But the unkind wind died away and denied him the success which appeared almost within his grasp. Throughout the afternoon he made no way, and in the evening, finding he could not do what he had desired, he altered course again to the southward before sunset. After dark he again bore up. The succession of movements indicates an intention—though this is surmise only—to cross the enemy's grain in the dark and get into Trincomali in the morning. But here again he was foiled. The wind came from the northward, light and variable, and beyond somewhat closing the land he not only made no progress towards the port but dropped further to the south.

Daylight on April 12th thus found him some thirty miles to the southward of Trincomali with the enemy to the northward of him but now dead to windward ; for Suffren had crossed his track during the night. It was now clear that his hopes to reach Trincomali without fighting his way in could not be fulfilled. At 9 o'clock he determined to engage and hauling his wind to a north-west by north course he formed line of battle. Suffren, about six miles off, came down before a pleasant, though as yet a light breeze, to attack, his plan of action on this occasion not including that overpowering concentration on the rear he had intended to

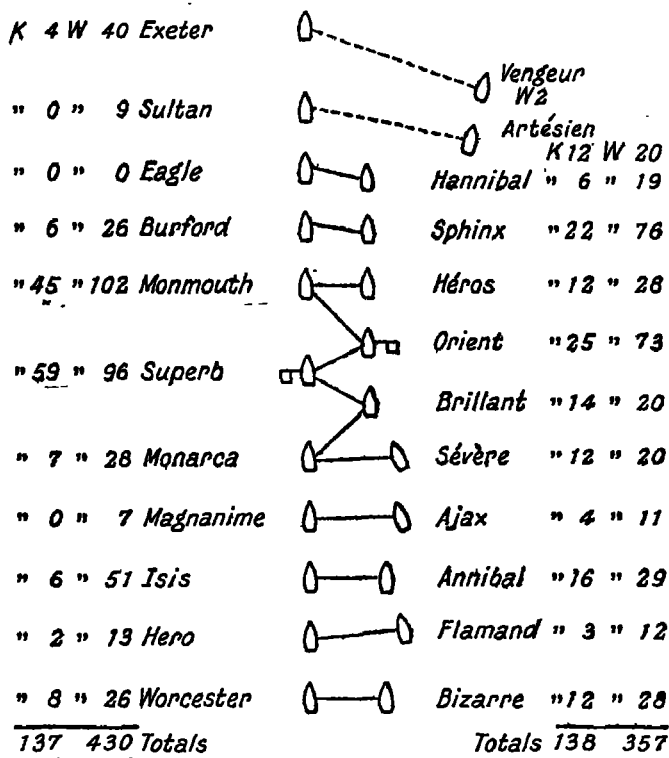
produce in the battle of Sadras. Instead, he ordered his ships to attack van to van, his extra ship being used, as was not uncommon, to double on the rear ship of the British line.

The wind was north-east and very light. Hughes formed his line by the wind, and was fairly soon in order. Suffren, owing to the lightness of the wind, the scattered condition of his squadron, perhaps also to some awkwardness in his commanders, took three hours to get his ships into position : and thus it was not until noon that he was ready to bear down on the British squadron, bringing with him a fair breeze at north-east. The action that followed, marked though it was by examples of splendid courage, notably on the part of the gallant Monmouth, presents few interesting tactical features. Suffren had massed his coppered ships in one fast van division, and thus drew from them the advantage which speed can confer in manœuvre. Hughes distributed his throughout his line. Suffren quickly experienced the difficulty, experienced by many a British commander in the attack from windward, of keeping his ships in a line and preserving their distances as they bore down, and as he approached the British line his squadron stretched out. The van ships, being faster than the others, reached the British van long before the rear was nearly in position, but when they arrived there the two leading French ships deliberately held off, while the rear, under Tromelin, when they in their turn came up, failed also to close.

The result of this conduct on the part of the leading and rear ships was that the action for the first two hours consisted in a fierce engagement between the five ships of the British and French centres. Numerically, in guns, there was a slight advantage in the British line. The five British ships consisted of one 74, two 70's and two 64's, the five French of two 74's, two 64's and a 50 ; making a broadside fire in the British favour of 163 guns to 141. But this material superiority was compensated for by the greater concentration of the French fire, most of which was directed

at the Superb and Monmouth, the effect of which is illustrated in their losses of 104 killed and 198 wounded against 63 and 170 of their opponents.<sup>1</sup>

The Monmouth suffered the severest trial. The two leading ships of the enemy first came into contact with her, firing



BATTLE OF PROVIDIEN, APRIL 12TH, 1782.

Diagrammatic Sketch, showing concentration in centre. General disposition at 3 p.m.

into her as they passed to the van. The French flagship, a 74, came next. The master of the Monmouth describes the course of events thus :

"As soon as within gunshot we engaged the enemy's

<sup>1</sup> The Monmouth, whose losses were particularly heavy, was manned very largely by native ratings. The figure in one account puts it as high as almost two-thirds.

third ship which passed under a press of sail. The French Admiral lying upon our Admiral's bow and his second ahead of him [viz. the Sphinx], we being our Admiral's second and ahead of him on that tack and supposing the French Admiral was going to board ours, luffed up to rake him, backed our mizen topsail which brought us within pistol shot of M. Suffrein and in that situation we engaged him and two more ahead from  $\frac{3}{4}$  after one to three when our mizen mast fell over the stern and soon after the main mast over the larboard quarter."

Thus, almost completely disabled, the Monmouth bore out of the line and joined the rear, but as in doing so she passed the whole seven ships of the enemy's rear, these successively all fired their broadsides into her. With losses of 46 killed and 102 wounded and two of her masts gone she could play no more part in the action.

Though none of the French ships suffered so severely, none receiving so heavy a concentration of fire, their total losses were severe and approximately equalled those of the British. The result was that while one British ship was a helpless cripple, needing now to be guarded and subsequently to be repaired, the injury in the enemy's force was more widely distributed. Such is the advantage derived from concentration of effort. Great credit was due to the captains of the two hindmost of the French ships in the centre, the Orient and Brillant, who, seeing their Admiral in difficulties, pressed forward and interposed themselves between him and Hughes, and by that action furnished a further degree of concentration upon the Monmouth and Superb.

Notwithstanding the crippling of the Monmouth the British line retained to a high degree its cohesion. Its discipline was not shaken; so that when, shortly after four p.m., the Admiral, seeing that the course steered was taking them unduly close to the shore, signalled to the squadron to wear together and form on the other tack, the movement was made in perfect order. The French tacked in reply and the engage-

ment was renewed on the opposite tack. Now the French Admiral lost his own foretopmast. Unmanageable, the flagship hauled out of the line, but Suffren promptly transferred his flag to the *Ajax*. But time was passing. At five the weather became threatening. Heavy clouds came up, the wind shifted to the northward in a squall of rain, and the disabled *Monmouth* being now in danger of being driven ashore or of becoming separated, Hughes made the signal to anchor. It was none too soon, for the water had shoaled badly and already the *Monmouth* had struck bottom in a quarter less four fathoms. She dropped her remaining bower, and at 6 o'clock the squadron anchored to cover her. Then darkness fell.

Suffren was in little less danger. His flagship was disabled, the *Orient* and *Brillant* were considerably damaged aloft, and some of his ships had struck on the outlying coral reefs. A storm was obviously blowing up and these ships were in no state to weather it. Ordering the frigate *Fine* to take his flagship in tow, he signalled to his squadron to draw off, and he brought it to anchor about two miles from the British in a position where, as he wrote, "six hours of bad weather might lose us the squadron; but my sole consolation was that the enemy would suffer the same fate."

Thus the action ended. The losses were not unduly unequal, the British having 137 killed and 430 wounded, the French 139 killed and 351 wounded. But the French were in the better position, for their losses came from a larger total force and no individual ship was so crippled as the *Monmouth*. Hughes summed up the engagement with "nor had either side any just cause to brag of a victory over the other. Night brought an end to the battle at the time it became most critical by both squadrons being disordered and both having disabled ships to protect."

At dawn next day the French squadron was seen lying at anchor to seaward, in no particular order. It did not appear to be injured aloft except for a foremast in the

flagship, and Hughes fully expected that an attempt would be made to capture his damaged Monmouth. The first thing therefore that he did was to re-anchor his ships in a good line with springs on their cables to secure himself against attack, and in that posture he proceeded with his repairs. The Monmouth, with the carpenters and artificers of the whole squadron working on board her, was his main concern. Below and aloft she was shattered.

Thus four days passed, for though Suffren had lost no lower masts, he himself was not fit for the sea until the 17th. On the 18th he got under sail and stood off and on in the hopes that the British would put to sea to fight him, but the Monmouth was not yet remasted and rigged and Hughes was not to be moved with a lame duck in his squadron unless he were forced to do so by a threat on Trincomali. In the afternoon of the 19th Suffren again trailed his coat, but as Hughes remained at anchor he saw that the British Admiral was not to be tempted to fight under disadvantageous conditions, and as he himself was not prepared to attack the British at anchor he stood away before dark to the south-east to repair to Batticaloa and refit and then to carry out his original intentions of recovering his scattered ships from Galle. Three days later the Monmouth's repairs were sufficiently made. Hughes then weighed and carried his squadron to Trincomali, anchoring in Back Bay on April 22nd, and putting his troops on shore.

When the critical situation into which the British squadron had been brought is considered, it seems strange that the French Commander did not endeavour to press his advantage as soon as he was sufficiently refitted aloft. As we have seen, he waited for two days only, and then left Hughes both unbeaten and also free to do that which he had set out to do—relieve Trincomali.

No one realised more fully than Suffren that the destruction of the British squadron was the surest way of attaining the French aims in India, and that Trincomali was a position



upon the possession of which the campaign at sea would largely, and might wholly, depend. Was there no way open to him to bring about an action under favourable conditions? He had shown, by attacking on the 12th, that he considered that he was strong enough to disable the British squadron. Had he no means now of bringing it to action while it was still weakened by the disablement of the Monmouth, either by attacking it at anchor, unsupported as it was by shore batteries, or, by threatening to attack Trincomali, force Hughes to sea to defend his base? There were, as we have seen and as he already knew, Dutch troops at Jaffna in readiness to assist. There was artillery on board the transports coming from Galle. He had frigates which he could detach to bring those transports up while he remained to hold or fight the British squadron, either at anchor or cruising anywhere between Provedien Island and Back Bay. There could be but little doubt that if he supported the Dutch in an attack, Hughes must come to the assistance of the defence and an action would result. Why then did he refrain from doing anything?

The French Admiral clearly felt that the situation would appear so favourable to the authorities in Paris that an explanation was needed to account for his not attacking the British in their anchorage. In a letter written to the Minister four days after the action, he gave his reasons. They are best repeated in his own words:

“I owe you a justification for not having attacked the enemy in the position he had taken up on the coast.

1. The uncertainty as to a coral shoal to seaward of them, on which the Ajax, Orient and Fine struck on April 12th.
2. In operations of this kind, all is lost unless one succeeds.
3. I have at present enough ammunition for one battle only.
4. Shortage of men.
5. No means of repairing my rigging.
6. The squadron is lacking in twelve spare topmasts.

7. I intend first to go to Galle where I shall find cordage, some ammunition and some men.

8. To make that attempt with any real hope of success, capacity, good-will, etc., are needed ; and assuredly I have experienced the want of these too greatly thus to risk all for all."

Of these reasons, two alone would seem the really weighty ones : the difficulty and risk of failure in an attack on a fleet in an anchorage, and the want of confidence in his captains. The off-lying shoal was a risk : but it formed no greater danger to his own ships, if they should go in to attack, than to Hughes's if they should put to sea to fight him ; as Suffren, by his movements and in his letters, implied it was within the British Admiral's power to do. The well-anchored fleet, on the other hand, was a deterrent, even though unsupported by land batteries, as Hood was showing that very year at St. Kitts with a force even proportionately weaker than that of Hughes.<sup>1</sup> Nelson was yet to show at the Nile that this situation could be tackled.

But the question of his confidence in his captains stands upon a different plane. Several had failed him off Sadras. Again they had failed him badly in this battle. If he could not trust them in a straightforward attack at sea conducted in the simplest possible manner, far less, undoubtedly, could he confide to them an attack under the conditions in Venloos Bay. One, he says, is a dotard, no longer of any use. Another goes into action "passably well," but has much deteriorated. Five others have behaved very indifferently ; and though Tromelin, the Commadore, had behaved better than he had done on the 17th February, he doubts whether he closed with the enemy as he should and could have done. With all that, he says, there is no case for a court-martial, or for relieving these officers, even if he possessed the necessary powers.

One other reason remained. He supposed the British

<sup>1</sup> Hood had 22 ships to the enemy's 33 : of which 29 only attacked him.

squadron to be fully as strong as the French, for he credited them with having one more 74-gun ship and two more 70's than they actually had : and he believed them to be better manned. For he, like Hughes, was short-handed. After the battle of the 17th February he was 600 below his complement, and though he had received some seamen at Porto Novo in the transports that arrived there, and thus reduced his shortage, he believed that Hughes had made up his complements by men from the Madras garrison which gave him musketry fire which his own squadron did not possess. Nor was he aware of the grievous condition of the last joined British ships, or the general sickness in the squadron. He too had sick on board, though how many is not certain ; but since on his arrival at Batticaloa he landed about 1,300 men, among whom were his wounded, he could hardly have had less than 1,000. This, however, can hardly have been his reason for not attacking, for with the belief that the English were as strong as himself he had not hesitated to attack them on the 12th. But his number of sick may well have been a reason for not being able to remain on that coast and hold Hughes while Trincomali was attacked. Because of them he could not keep the sea and await the arrival of his troops from Galle and the outcome of the prospective siege. Briefly expressed, he did not possess the necessary endurance to remain at sea. Hygiene enforced a limitation on him.

It is now possible to review Hughes's choice of the 9th between outmanœuvring and outfighting his enemy. His decision to get round the enemy had been very nearly justified by events. He had gained on him, and if the wind had not failed on the 11th it is far from improbable that he would have crossed Suffren's grain and reached Back Bay. But the fact remained that he had not succeeded ; and as matters had turned out he had eventually been obliged to fight under most disadvantageous conditions, with the lee gage and no sea room to leeward. His movements gave the enemy that

valuable possession, the weather gage, and with that the initiative. It is true that the enemy had not profited by it, and that as the result of the action Hughes's losses were not greatly in excess of those of the enemy, and that he achieved his object: Trincomali was rendered secure for the present. But it is hardly to be supposed that he counted upon such ineffective conduct as was displayed by the captains in the enemy's ships in the van and rear. Indeed, if he had so counted, it would have furnished him with the best of all possible reasons for taking advantage of the weather gage and profiting by the superior seamanlike capacities of his own captains. Looking at the situation in the light of complete knowledge—knowledge that though his own ships were undermanned so, though to a lesser degree, were those of the enemy; that there was a definite lack of good will and co-operation in the spirits of some of the enemy captains: that a successful outcome of his move depended on the wind holding: and that failure of the wind, or unexpected action by the enemy, might oblige him to accept action in a situation more disadvantageous than that in which he was on April 9th—it appears to the writer that, as is generally the case, the boldest course would certainly have served him best. Possessing the initiative he would have possessed not merely the moral advantages but also the only means of which material inferiority can be transformed into superiority by concentration upon a part of the enemy. Prudence demanded an offensive. There was in reality some imprudence in refusing, on the chance of outsailing the enemy, to seize the opportunity which was offered to him three days earlier.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BATTLE OF JULY 6TH, 1782

SUFFREN, when he withdrew from the offing of Provedien on April 19th, took his squadron to Batticaloa, a tedious eleven days' journey in the light and changeable winds of the "little monsoon." These days at sea cost him many lives and brought on more sickness, and on his arrival he landed no fewer than 1,300 sick and wounded men. But neither his failure to destroy Hughes nor to prevent the relief of Trincomali caused any abatement in his desire to renew the struggle with the least possible delay. He proceeded to water and refit his ships, using such scanty materials as the locality could provide, with the greatest possible energy, and he sent a ship to Galle to order his separated transports to join him at once.

The news of the failure to intercept the British reinforcement came as a great disappointment to the Governor of Colombo, who, so soon as it reached him, abandoned his previous sanguine hopes of an early recapture of the base; for he was unaware how small and ill-composed was the detachment the Madras Presidency had sent with Hughes. Not only was prospective success thus snatched away, but there were at the same time indications of probable further losses in his Island: for the documents which had been captured from the British mission to Kandy under Boyd revealed Macartney's proposal for an attack on Ceylon—a march on Jaffna from Trincomali, and a move southward down the west coast to Colombo, taking all the important ports and stations on its way, while Colombo was blockaded by sea. The island had little resisting power. Jaffna would fall quickly if besieged—already it was suffering

privation from a want of rice, the supply of which from Cochin had been inadequate owing to the danger at sea ; and " Europe stores " of all kinds were lacking in all the settlements in the Island, as the only ships which had left Holland in 1780 had been taken by Johnstone at Saldanha Bay in 1781, and not a single ship had been sent out since then.

The doctrine that offence is the best defence receives one of its many illustrations in the attitude of the Governor of Colombo. The belief, engendered by Macartney's captured plans, that the British proposed to attack Ceylon not only completely demobilised the Dutch by inducing them strictly to refuse to give any active aid to their allies, but, by making calls upon those allies for help, added appreciably to the cares of the French Commander. The eyes of the Governor of Colombo saw all of his own dangers but none of the enemy's difficulties. Nothing would be easier, he pointed out, for the English, than the sending of an expedition from Bombay to capture Colombo, on the lines proposed by Macartney, nor was there any doubt that they possessed the necessary forces. Hence he urged that Suffren should remain in the western and southern waters of Ceylon to guard the island, to allay the fears of the Dutch inhabitants, and restore Kandyan confidence ; for the losses the Dutch were undergoing had seriously undermined their prestige in Kandy : and, if one thing only—the safety of Ceylon—were the object of the campaign, his arguments carried a strong measure of conviction. The idea, which had been suggested by the French military commander in the Carnatic, that the Dutch should send a body of troops to strengthen Hyder Ali, naturally received no support from M. Falck. How, he asked, could he send men out of the Island when Galle, Colombo and Jaffna were in such immediate and obvious danger ? Indeed, he pointed out, so far from Ceylon reinforcing the Carnatic, Hyder should reinforce Ceylon.

Suffren, though he himself realised the possibility of such

an attack as M. Falck feared,<sup>1</sup> was far too well acquainted with the larger problems at issue to use his squadron in the manner proposed. He wrote to calm the Governor's fears and at the same time to assure him of the impossibility of obtaining any detachments from Hyder, who was supremely uninterested in the fate of Ceylon. He pointed out that that danger might now be discounted, for the South-west Monsoon, now about to begin, would protect the coast. The French squadron, moreover, had other indispensable duties to perform. It must remain on the Coromandel coast to get supplies, to concert plans with M. Duchemin, to reassure Hyder who might otherwise abandon the alliance—and where then would Ceylon be?—and to get men from the army to replace its losses. When that was done he must keep to the eastward to assure his junction with his own reinforcements whose early arrival was confidently expected. All of this he must and could do before it would be possible, for reasons of the monsoon, for the English to attack Ceylon. If, at the end of the monsoon, danger should still threaten, “every other interest whatever shall be sacrificed for the security of Ceylon.”<sup>2</sup>

Though he wrote thus confidently of the situation, Suffren was far from easy in his mind. His want of naval stores was worrying him greatly, for though the Dutch had let him have—on payment—some quantities of munitions and rope, they could not furnish him with the larger spars he needed. If he had to fight another action soon, as he fully expected he would, and was badly injured aloft, the only alternative to returning to the Islands, which above all he desired to avoid as it meant the loss of the campaign, was to get his supplies in Malacca: and if he should go thither an attack on Ceylon might easily be made in his absence. But as it was idle to speculate upon possibilities when the Coromandel coast was where he was needed immediately,

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de' Souillac, April 24th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to Falck, May 2nd, 1782. *Colombo Records*.

he did not allow his mind to be diverted from the certain to the problematical. One thing, however, he did consider. He was expecting an early reinforcement, and in view of this possibility he thought it might be well not to seek a battle, notwithstanding his present superiority, until its arrival should increase that superiority, and make the prospects of decisive victory more certain.<sup>1</sup>

It was with these considerations in his mind that Suffren, when his repairs were at last completed, on June 3rd, and his sick restored to a measure of health, sailed for Tranquebar and Cuddalore. He anchored off Cuddalore on June 20th, and there replaced his losses with detachments from Duche-min's army, draining thereby still further the small French force on land and making it harder to keep Hyder in the field: thus emphasising the weight of Hastings' reproof to the Bombay Council for their failure to co-operate in Malabar. At Cuddalore he received news that 2,000 English troops with 5,000 sepoy were assembled in the southern district. This concentration he interpreted as an intention to attack Ceylon. So Falck, after all, was possibly right, "in which case," he wrote, "I observe with sorrow that my position on the East coast will be of no help to you. This makes me urge the Generals and the Nabob to send you help, which could go via Jaffna. If my fears are unwarranted let me know, and what the English are doing."<sup>2</sup> His fears for the safety of Ceylon, accentuated by the news of this British force, were still further increased by information which reached him shortly afterwards. The English had made peace with the Mahrattas. The Bombay army was therefore now set free and must be expected to play a part in the campaigns in the south. Falck, however, on the other hand, was now reassured. He had grasped the situation. He realised the difficulty the English would have on the coast of Malabar in the coming monsoon;

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Falck, May 15th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to Falck, June 15th, 1782. *Colombo Records*.



and he suggested that the rumour should be spread on the coast of the early arrival there of the French squadron "avec l'exagération convenable."<sup>1</sup>

It is not without interest to observe that five days after writing this letter Suffren decided to capture Negapatam, an operation much urged upon him by Hyder Ali, the direct result of which was to bring about his third action with Hughes. There were definite naval advantages to be gained by possession of the place, above all the defended anchorage, but the opinion may be hazarded that the decision to do what Hyder so much desired coming so close upon his expressions of anxiety as to the intentions of the British Army in the Samorin country, may have had as one of its objects a diversion to occupy the attention of that army and to prevent its movement to Ceylon; and in any case the troops would be in a position to reinforce Ceylon if necessary,<sup>2</sup> another illustration of the close interrelation of the naval and military operations. With this intention he sent M. de Moissac to Hyder Ali to borrow four hundred European troops and a Sepoy battalion. Hyder, who had been greatly impressed by the reports, given him of the French, of the two actions at sea, now willingly consented to the removal of troops from the southern area for this purpose, and Suffren was thus able to embark some 3,000 men.<sup>3</sup> But on July 2nd, just as all was ready, he received the inconvenient news that Hughes had appeared off Tranquebar. His intentions are now clear—"I am embarking four hundred men and eight hundred sepoy to strengthen my crews; three hundred more for the siege of Negapatam, or to help

<sup>1</sup> It will be noted that this apparently was done at a later period. *Vide* p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> "Si une entreprise que j'ai à cœur a lieu, nous serons à même de vous secourir." Suffren to Falck, June 15th, 1782.

<sup>3</sup> Two hundred of the regiment d'Austrasie, 400 of the Ile de France, the legion of Lauzun, some volunteers of Bourbon, 2 companies of artillery and 800 sepoy under d'Espinassy. Suffren to Falck.

the Dutch in case the appearance of the English has an attack upon Ceylon as its object.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, with chillings towing astern to land his men, the French Commander left Cuddalore on July 3rd.

Before sailing, Suffren had found himself embarrassed with his prisoners, of whom he had over 60 officers and 400 men. Either he must keep them in Cuddalore, where a garrison beyond the actual needs of defence must be retained to guard them, to the prejudice of the operations on land, or he must send them to the islands for internment and lose the services of his transports. He could not keep them on board his ships, consuming much-needed victuals and encumbering the space. He wrote therefore to Macartney proposing an exchange of these prisoners for some 350 French prisoners who were in the hands of the British. Macartney communicated with Coote who, knowing there were also some British prisoners in Hyder Ali's hands, proposed that the cartel should extend to the allies of the French, and that in any exchange those who had suffered longest and most, and under the vile conditions of imprisonment in Mysore, should be the first released. Hughes, to whom also Suffren wrote, replied that it was not in his power to arrange an exchange which was a matter to be settled by the head of the Government. Macartney, heedless of the sufferings of these unfortunates, did nothing, and Suffren, in spite of urgent remonstrances from the French officers and civilians at Pondicherry, landed all these wretched seamen and others and placed them in Hyder's hands. He first imprisoned them in miserable holes in Chillumbrum, and they were subsequently marched into Mysore, there to linger and die. None will deny his difficulty : but neither can it be denied that shipping was available, taken from his enemy prizes, ample to have conveyed these men to Mauritius or Batavia if it was impossible to guard them on the territory in occupation of the French army. Military

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Souillac, July 2nd, 1782.

difficulties were not, however, the real reason for this action. It was to improve his relations and increase his own influence with Hyder Ali. "It is far more to increase his confidence in me than to reply to the proceedings of Macartney, Hughes and Coote that I am confiding the English prisoners to the Nabob."<sup>1</sup>

He had a better way of gaining the confidence of Hyder than that of cruelty to prisoners, a way he had already discovered : that of showing him the prowess of the French squadron. It was not from ignorance of what must be the fate of these poor men, delivered into the hands of this despot. His own countrymen with tears in their eyes begged him not to do it. That he so disregarded the claims of humanity must remain a stain upon his name, regretted by none more than those who most admire his outstanding military character.

Hughes, while these events were taking place, had been repairing his ships and restoring the health of his men. His crews, by death, wounds and sickness, were reduced to barely more than half their strength : and of the sick and wounded 380 had died. Fresh meat and vegetables were not easy to procure for so many men in that isolated spot, for there are but few cattle, and those very poor, kept by the local population : and his men had to forage far afield into the country to procure food for themselves. When the difficulties which Suffren met with in getting spars, and his energy in repairing his ships, are compared with what are called Hughes's advantages and his dawdling, it is forgotten, or not known, that Hughes had no food supplies at Trincomali ; and in this respect Suffren was better off at Batticaloa, where the Dutch Governor provided what supplies that scanty district could furnish and procured others from Manaar : while at Cuddalore Hyder sent him ample quantities of the much-needed fresh provisions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Souillac.

<sup>2</sup> Falck to Suffren, May 10th-14th, 1782. Suffren to Falck, May 3rd, "Bahadur provides me with food in abundance."

The refit of the British ships was completed before the health of the men was restored and while this was in progress Hughes was being kept well informed of the presence of the French at Batticaloa and of the progress of military affairs at Madras. There, Coote was mainly employed on the defensive, holding Vandeloer and covering Permacol and Wandewash, the former of which, however, fell into enemy hands on May 17th. As before, his principal difficulty was supplies. Until he could get them he could do no more than hold his position round Madras, but he had hopes of being able before long to make a move to the southward. There was little Hughes could do to assist him beyond protecting the supplies of rice coming down from Bengal, but when the news came that the French had gone from Batticaloa to Cuddalore, a return of the squadron to the coast as soon as possible was needed, and on June 24th Hughes embarked every available man who could be of any service and sailed to Tranquebar and Negapatam. His intentions, as expressed in a letter to Macartney of June 25th, were "to watch their motions, neither seeking nor shunning an engagement till I am reinforced, which by all accounts I have received must be soon<sup>1</sup>; when I doubt not I shall be able to drive them from these seas."<sup>2</sup> He expected to be able to keep the sea to windward until about July 17th, when he would be obliged to return to Madras for stores and victuals. But in the meantime he was very short of powder. He had expended much in his battles, and the greater part of the replenishment which at this moment was being sent to him was captured by the enemy. Five vessels, laden with powder, rice and cordage, had been despatched to the squadron by the Madras Council without giving Hughes any warning or observing any precautions,

<sup>1</sup> The reinforcement to which Hughes here refers was one of six of the line, to be commanded by Sir Ralph Bickerton. A letter dated December 15th, 1781, had informed Hughes that it was about to be sent. See post, p. 305, for further details. Actually (*vide post*), he remained until July 19th.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes to Macartney, June 25th, 1782. *Ad.* 7, 775.

such as taking a wide course off the land, for their safety. The result of this carelessness was that they ran into the arms of the French squadron off Cuddalore, by whom two were taken, while a third, a coppered ship, only escaped by her fast sailing and by throwing overboard the bulk of her cargo. By similar mismanagement another ship, the Yarmouth, carrying twenty officers and two companies of sepoys with artillery and munitions to strengthen the Trincomali garrison, was also captured. What added to the seriousness of these losses was that these supplies, so much needed by the French, fell into their hands.

Shortly before Hughes sailed from Trincomali he received news that the enemy were preparing to embark a large number of troops. What did this imply? Trincomali might certainly be their destination, but for the moment he did not expect them to attempt this, for the garrison had been reinforced, and although the reinforcement was inadequate, no danger would come to the base so long as the squadron was in the windward position to the southward, and in its present strength of eleven to twelve. Until the British squadron should be defeated or obliged to abandon its position to windward Suffren could not attempt the assault: and Hughes concluded that Suffren's embarking men was for the purposes of strengthening his crews for another trial in battle, which—as he said—he himself “would neither seek nor shun.”

Thus the situation was that Suffren, believing Hughes still to be disabled at Trincomali, had intended to attack Negapatam, but if the British squadron should appear to fight it, though he hoped he would effect a junction with his reinforcement before another battle; and that Hughes, equally hoping that his own reinforcement would arrive before a battle was forced, was also prepared to fight if the military situation demanded immediate action.

It was in consequence of these decisions that as the British squadron lay off Negapatam on July 5th, the Eagle at 10.30

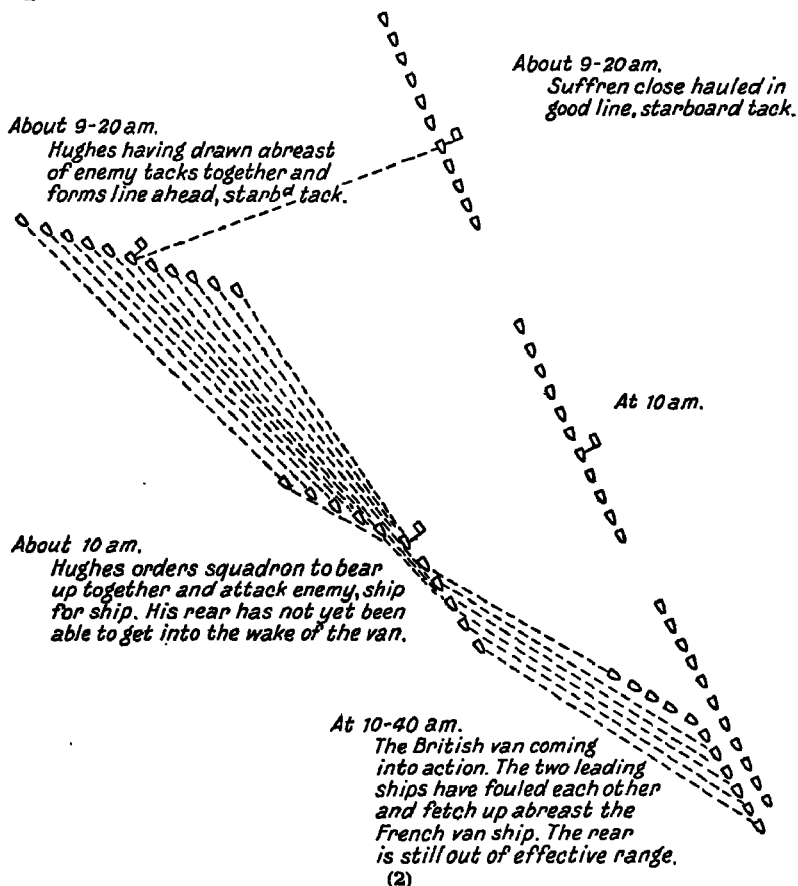
a.m. reported the appearance of ten sail of ships in the north-east quarter. The sea breeze was still blowing fresh and Hughes decided to wait till the breeze came off the land, for the enemy was still at a great distance and it was not yet possible to make out in what force he was coming. The ships were cleared for action, the motions of the enemy were watched. At noon it was possible to make out that the French squadron consisted of twelve of the line, five frigates and a brig ; so once more Hughes had to engage superior force. At three o'clock, the land breeze then blowing gustily from the west and south-west, Hughes weighed. As he was doing so a heavy squall struck the enemy. The *Ajax* lay along and the ports of her lower tiers being open ready for action, the water poured in and nearly upset her until she was relieved by her maintopmast and mizen topgallant mast going over the side ; when she dropped to the rear of the line, but did not leave the squadron.

The enemy was now to leeward. It was in Hughes's power to attack, and, the disablement of one of the enemy's ships having reduced the enemy to numerical equality, the opportunity for so doing appeared to some observers in the enemy fleet favourable. Hughes, however, decided to defer action. His reasons, in his own words, were that " it was too late to do the business properly." He had the wind and he meant to keep it, and to make every possible use of his opportunity, with time at his disposal, on the morrow. With this in view, after weighing, he stood to the southward and spent the night tacking every two hours to ensure holding his position to windward.

The French Admiral, seeing that he was not to be engaged, and anxious to have the full use of the *Ajax* in the battle, shortly afterwards came to an anchor, and sent two frigates to assist her to rig a new topmast. This he expected, as he had every right to expect, would be done during the fifteen hours before dawn : and his indignation at seeing the ship lying in the same disabled condition next morning



which was south-west, having just got under way after its night at anchor. Ordering his ships to take station at one cable apart—a close order which apparently they never attained—at a little before 7 o'clock he ordered the squadron to bear down and attack the enemy, each ship



(2)  
BATTLE OF NEGAPATAM. JULY 6TH, 1782,  
Final stages of the approach, and the attack.

attacking her opposite in the line but with the exception that his next astern, the *Monarca*, was to attack the same ship as himself. Four of his heaviest ships—the 70's and 74's—were massed in the centre, and he thus would seem to have intended to bring about a concentration of



heaviest metal on the enemy's centre. After the squadrons had thus proceeded, closing slowly, for about an hour, Suffren saw the opportunity to pass across the British rear ; and he tacked his squadron in succession to do so. Hughes stood on for another hour apparently without altering the line of bearing of his squadron—the logs record no change—until he was nearly abreast the enemy. He then ordered the squadron to tack, rear ships first ; but a few minutes later, seeing that the enemy was passing quicker than he expected, he altered the order to tacking together to expedite the movement. The squadron had now to get from a line of bearing about W.N.W. and E.N.E. to a new line ahead on a S.S.E.<sup>v</sup> course : and the errors in position naturally arising in sailing for two hours in a quarter line had to be corrected. Hughes therefore stood on for about another hour to enable the rear to get into line and the two van ships to correct their positions, making frequent signals to the ships to take up their stations. At 10 o'clock he could wait no longer and he ordered the squadron to bear up and attack : the rear was not yet in the line of bearing, the last four or five ships still made a sharp angle with the rest of the line and were some distance astern.

The leading British ships were the *Hero*, 74, and the *Exeter*. As they neared the French line they came into collision, and in consequence shot too far ahead, with the result that the *Hero* brought up on the bow and the *Exeter* on the quarter of the leader of the enemy's line, the 50-gun *Flamand*. This small vessel made the most admirable defence against her two superior antagonists, and though she herself was riddled aloft she inflicted even greater injuries on them. On the other hand the *Isis*, 50, found herself in combat with the *Annibal* 74, and in the same way as the French 50 had got the better of her opponents, the *Isis* beat off the 74 with losses nearly four times those which she received.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See plate, p. 242, in which the losses of each ship are shown. These are the total losses in the battle, but the greatest part of them occurred at this phase of the action.














The Burford 74 engaged the *Sévère* 64 with fairly equally balanced results ; the Sultan fought the *Brillant*, inflicting on her very great losses and finally bringing down her main mast. The two flagships engaged each other in a fierce duel in which the results were all in favour of the British ship. The *Monarca*, though ordered to support her flagship, did not do so at the opening phase but fought the *Sphinx*, causing her twice the losses she received.

Astern of the *Monarca* the British ships did not come into close action. Owing to the manner in which the approach had been made they were at a greater distance than the ships in the centre and van, but for what reason they did not close later is not made evident in their logs. The action therefore between the four British and five French ships in the rear was conducted at long and ineffective range. It is possible to hazard the opinion that being four to five their captains deliberately refrained to engage the superior force and elected to act on a containing force while the action was decided at close range in that part of the line where superior force was concentrated. Precedent existed for such tactics. Temple West, for instance, without instructions and without making a record of his intentions, had acted in such a containing capacity in the van at the battle of Toulon, and the use of containing forces was perfectly familiar to officers of that day.

In this manner, with some variations in position, the action continued very hotly for about two hours. The *Flamand*, fighting with great gallantry, was at last reduced almost to a wreck aloft, though her spars still stood, and she edged out of the line. This opened the way for a more intense concentration on ships ahead of the French Admiral which had already each suffered heavily in men. The two flagships, with their seconds ahead and astern, were very closely engaged,<sup>1</sup> and the Burford with the *Annibal* or

<sup>1</sup> Viz. Sultan, Superb (flag) and *Monarca* were engaging *Brillant*, *Héros* (flag), and *Sphinx*.

Sévère. Shortly after noon, the Sultan, having inflicted very heavy losses of over 200 men on the *Brillant*, brought down her main and mizen masts : and then pushing ahead to the next ship, the *Sévère*,<sup>1</sup> engaged her with such good

		<i>Hero</i>	<i>K 12 W 23</i>
<i>K 13 W 56 Flammant</i>		<i>Exeter</i>	<i>" 11 " 24</i>
<i>" 28 " 80 Annibal</i>		<i>Isis</i>	<i>" 9 " 19</i>
<i>" 20 " 27 Sévère</i>		<i>Burford</i>	<i>" 7 " 34</i>
<i>" 47 " 187 Brillant</i>		<i>Sultan</i>	<i>" 16 " 21</i>
<i>" 25 " 72 Héros</i>		<i>Superb</i>	<i>" 6 " 19</i>
<i>" 19 " 85 Sphinx</i>		<i>Monarca</i>	<i>" 8 " 46</i>
<i>" 5 " 13 Hannibal</i>		<i>Worcester</i>	<i>" 1 " 9</i>
<i>" 12 " 38 Artésien</i>		<i>Monmouth</i>	<i>" 3 " 17</i>
<i>" 8 " 44 Vengeur</i>		<i>Eagle</i>	<i>" 4 " 9</i>
<i>" 0 " 0 Bizarre</i>		<i>Magnanime</i>	<i>" 2 " 19</i>
<i>" 0 " 0 Orient</i>			
<u><i>" 178 " 602 Totals</i></u>		<u><i>Totals 77 244</i></u>	

BATTLE OF NEGAPATAM, JULY 6TH, 1782.

Diagrammatic sketch of dispositions between 11 a.m. and 12.35 p.m.

effect that the captain of the *Sévère* hauled down his colours.<sup>2</sup> But at this moment—about 12.35—the wind suddenly

<sup>1</sup> The positions of the ships in the line were not maintained in the same order throughout the action.

<sup>2</sup> The *Sultan's* log thus describes how the situation stood : " About this time (viz. noon) the Admirals second ahead being alongside the *Sultan* and engaged with her had her main and mizen masts shot away. The *Sultan* then pushed ahead to the next ship which she engaged very close until the French ship hauled down her colours and surrendered, but the Admiral prevented our sending a boat on board which the French ship taking the advantage of bore away for the body of the enemy and hoisted her colours again."

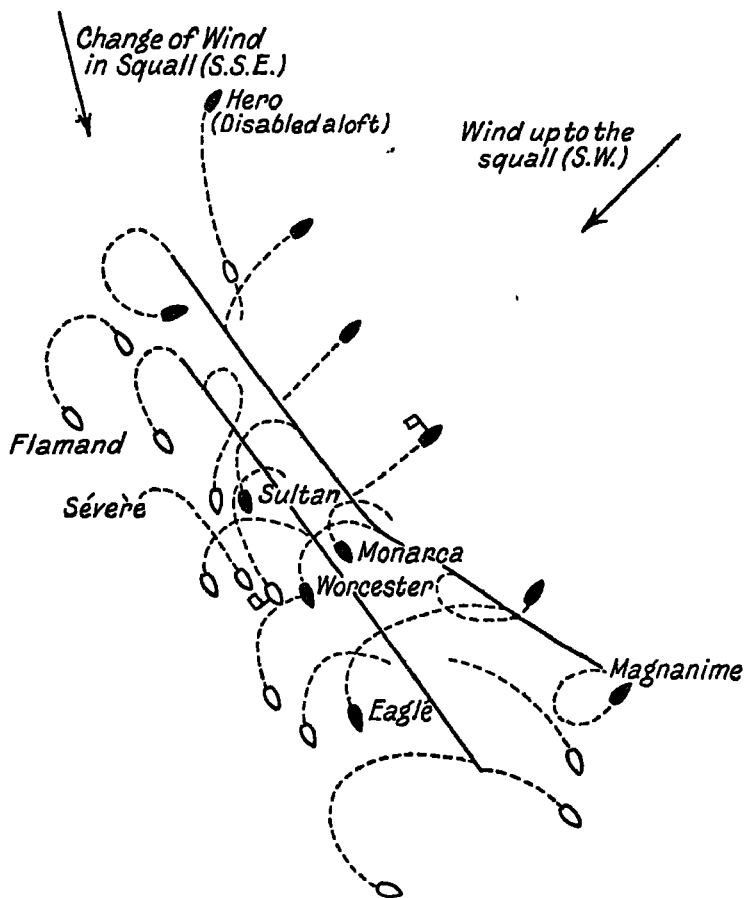
and without warning flew round in a sharp squall from S.W. to S.S.E. Both fleets were thrown aback. Some paid off towards their enemy, some from him. Except the *Sévère*, who fell to windward, the French paid off to leeward. Some of the British, particularly those in the rear which had suffered least aloft, paid off towards the enemy to leeward and continued the engagement, but those which had suffered aloft flew up into the wind,<sup>1</sup> as the ships of that build generally did. Thus the British squadron became widely separated, and Hughes, to collect them together, made the signal to re-form the line. It was in obedience to this signal that the *Sultan* desisted from sending her boat to the *Sévère*.

It proved no easy matter to re-form the squadron. The *Worcester*, *Eagle* and *Burford* eagerly continued on their former tack, pushing on fast towards a portion of the enemy. Hughes, therefore, at about twenty minutes later hauled down the signal for the line and made that for wearing, intending to follow it by the signal for general chase: but no sooner were the flags at the mast head than the captain of his second astern, the *Monarca*, hailed him and told him that his ship was ungovernable and could not get off the wind, while the *Hero*, also crippled aloft and flying the flag of distress, was seen going away before the wind. Deprived of these two ships and possibly influenced by the determined attitude of the French Admiral, who was re-forming his squadron and bringing the less damaged ships into a compact body to protect the disabled ones, he altered his mind and stood on.

Both squadrons were now standing to the westward on the port tack, the British divided, with about half the ships to the northward and half to the southward. Before he could do more Hughes thought it essential to re-form his squadron, and made the signal for the line of battle ahead intending,

<sup>1</sup> Many had lost heavily in their fore and foretopmasts and this continued, with the action of the winds on their poops, flung them up into the wind. The *Monarca*, *Burford* and *Hero* were ungovernable at this moment.

it appears from his despatches and letters, to resume the action when he should have got his ships together and when the *Monarca* had knotted her rigging enough to get her under control. But now the fickle wind fell and died almost away,



JULY 6TH, 1782.

Showing separation of squadrons when sea breeze struck them in a squall, ships paying off both ways.  
(After Cunnat.)

and by half-past two the squadrons were but barely crawling through the water. Hughes then decided that a renewal of the action was not possible that day, and he stood on for the anchorage off Negapatam under an easy sail to allow

his disabled ships to keep company, with the intention of making his repairs there, and resuming his windward station off Negapatam. The squadron anchored at half-past five between Negapatam and Nagore. The French did the same almost an hour later some twelve miles to the northward.

Next morning, July 7th, the French were seen to get under way. With the *Ajax*, now remasted, in company and the dismasted *Brillant* in tow, Suffren was returning to the northward. His attempt to capture Negapatam had been foiled ; and he had not only obtained no victory at sea, but had lost far more heavily than the British. But his spirit was undiminished. His first thought was to get his squadron refitted and his forces in men replaced with as little delay as possible, and with that object he was now proceeding to Cuddalore. How the campaigns on land and sea were interlocked is again obvious. Without Cuddalore the disabled French ships would have been in a most precarious situation.

Hughes's first intention on learning of the departure of the French was to pursue. On second thoughts, with his tottering masts, he decided it was impracticable. But he did one thing which, if it has no particular strategical or tactical interest to-day, has a certain interest of its own. He sent a frigate with a flag of truce to Suffren claiming the surrender of the *Sévère*. She had struck, he said, to the Sultan. Her colours had been hauled down, her captain had made every sign of surrender, and the people on her poop had called out to the Sultan "to cease fire and give quarter," which the Sultan had done. But when the British ship wore the *Sévère* deliberately re-opened fire, and then bore up and rejoined the body of the fleet "and then, and not before, he hoisted his colours."

When Suffren received this message he had not yet heard of the incident. He did not know that any of his ships had struck and he replied at once that no such thing had hap-

pened—the colours might have come down but only from the halliards being shot away : and he continued, “ But if your claim is as well founded as it appears to you to be, I doubt not that the King my master will attend to it ; but as to myself, who do not see things with the same eyes, I think that I neither can nor ought to do so.” When, however, on arrival at Cuddalore he instituted an enquiry he learned the facts, and found that the colours had actually been struck by the captain but were rehoisted by junior officers who refused to allow this base conduct, he removed the captain from his command and sent him back to the islands for passage to Europe and trial.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the third action was again indecisive. The forces had been numerically equal but there was the slight advantage of a total of thirteen guns in the British broadsides. That Hughes’s claim to have “ gained a decided superiority over the enemy ” was justified is shown by the losses,<sup>2</sup> but as it cannot have been upon the toll of losses that he based this statement—written as it was on July 15th before he had information of them—it can only be supposed that he made it on what he saw of the condition of the squadrons. In his despatch he wrote, “ Had the wind not shifted and thrown his Majesty’s squadron out of action at the very time when some of the enemy ships had broken their line and were running away, I have good reason to believe it would have ended in the capture of several of their line-of-battle ships.” If this was his view it is not easy to understand why he did not press that advantage. A battle normally passes through two stages, called by Napoleon the “ flottante ” and the “ foudroyante.” The “ flottante ” stage, that of breaking the cohesion of the enemy, had been accomplished. Was it in his power, despite the change of wind and consequent throwing of his own forces into disorder, to pass to the “ foudroyante ” ? The wind would have enabled him to

<sup>1</sup> Some further notes will be found at the end of the chapter on this incident.

<sup>2</sup> British : 77 killed, 235 wounded ; French : 178 killed, 602 wounded.

attack. Two of his ships, it is true, were out of action—the *Hero* and the *Monarca*—from damage aloft, but both were to windward and in safety while the enemy had one dismasted ship—the *Brillant*—and one badly disabled—the *Flamand*; and they were to leeward. The wind was light but wind there still was, for he himself says he first had the intention of pursuing; and with the knowledge that he had had the better of the enemy, the occasion appears to have been one in which that advantage should have been pressed to the full in the general chase which he had for a moment contemplated. More particularly was this to be desired as any postponement would restore to the enemy his superiority so soon as the *Ajax* should rejoin. There is no doctrine more firmly established by experience than that that a thing is not well done if it is possible to do more. The fact that he contemplated chase, joined to Suffren's expectation that the attack would, and therefore could, be renewed, leads to the belief that weather conditions would have permitted a renewal at that time: and there were still nearly four hours of daylight after half-past two in which to bring about a decision. If this be so, and if Hughes, like Hotham and Bridport on later occasions, was acting on the principle that he had "done very well," his failure to continue to press the enemy can only be regarded as a serious error, and one which had far-reaching consequences: for a decisive defeat of the enemy squadron in July would have prevented the loss of Trincomali in September.

Looking at the immediate strategical results of the action we see this. Hughes went to Negapatam in order to be in a windward position to meet his reinforcements, and, if attack were made on Trincomali or Negapatam, to defend them. Suffren went to Negapatam with the object of recapturing it. Either was prepared to fight. But while Suffren's intention to take Negapatam or destroy the British was frustrated, Hughes's intention to oppose such an attempt succeeded, and he remained in the windward position



he had wished to hold to meet the expected outcoming reinforcement.

#### HUGHES'S CLAIM FOR THE SÉVÈRE

Hughes's claim for the surrender of the *Sévère* after the action, in consequence of her having hauled down her colours, may have a fantastic appearance to modern eyes, but it was in accordance with those still-existing survivals of the old chivalrous laws of war. In reporting the incident in his despatch he warmly described her conduct in escaping and reopening fire, with her colours still down as "conduct which would disgrace a Turk." He made the claim he says "according to the law of nations and the established practice in time of war, of which the surrender of the French ship *Hero* to the claim of Lord Howe under similar circumstances in the year 1759 is a precedent." The incident to which he referred occurred in the battle of Quiberon Bay. Lord Howe in the *Magnanime* attacked the *Héros*, which struck to her; but as it was blowing hard no boat could be sent to take possession. Next day she was still afloat, but she got under way with the *Soleil Royal* and ran herself ashore, and was burnt by ships sent in by Hawke to destroy her.

When an opportunity for exchange of prisoners occurred Howe and Hawke expected that the *Héros'* crew would be given up. But none were sent aboard. Hawke warmly remonstrated with the Duc d'Aiguillon, and after reciting the circumstances said, "I therefore claim these officers and men prisoners and expect from your Grace's known honour that they will be delivered up to me." He received only an evasive answer, to which he replied in vigorous terms: "I can only further assure your Grace that had a British man-of-war under my command begged quarter and surrendered to the French and afterwards ran away with his ship in open breach of the laws of war, I would have immediately have delivered up the ship with its commander to have been treated as the forfeiture of his honour deserved." The wording of

Hughes's letter is in nearly identical terms with that of Hawke, even to the reference to begging for quarter, evidence of which was given in three written statements by officers in the Sultan.<sup>1</sup>

This conception of chivalry in surrender was still alive at the time of Trafalgar. Collingwood wrote a similar letter claiming the surrender of d'Alava in person.<sup>2</sup>

A further example of the manner in which the "Laws of War" were regarded as binding upon an officer who had once made the accepted signals and signs of surrender occurred in Duckworth's action on February 6th, 1806. In that battle it was reported that the French ship *Diomède* struck to the *Agamemnon*, and ran on shore, all her masts going overboard, "her captain taking off his hat and making every sign of surrender, whereupon the *Agamemnon* ceased firing." After she had run ashore, her captain burnt her. The captain of the *Diomède*, when subsequently rescued and taken prisoner, offered Captain Keats his sword: but Keats, considering his action dishonourable, disdainfully refused it. "This, of course," said Duckworth, "made explanation necessary on my side; and I acquainted Captain Henry (of the *Diomède*) that I had marked his dishonourable conduct in my public letter; when, feeling, as he appears to do, like a man of honour, and referring to his officers and ship's company, they gave the strongest testimony that the pendant was always flying, though the Ensign was shot away: and this from strict investigation since my arrival here, appears to be the case: and as Sir Edward Berry is not present to refer to, and the Commodore in the *Brave* allows he hailed the *Agamemnon*, and what has been recited passed between them, I have no doubt that the *Diomède* has been mistaken for the *Brave*, by her Ensign being down. I therefore, Sir, feeling that character is much more valuable than life, am

<sup>1</sup> The incident of 1759 is described in Burrow's *Life of Lord Hawke*, pp. 236-47. Also in Beatson, vol. iii, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of Lord Collingwood*, p. 141.

to beg that the heavy charge on Captain Henry may be done away with in such manner as their Lordships' judgment may appear most proper."

Thus Hughes was pursuing no out-of-date regard for the ancient and outworn laws of chivalry in 1782. It was still a tradition of honourable conduct that once the ship had struck she became a prize, and could neither seize an opportunity to escape, as the *Sévère* had done, nor to rob her captors by burning, as it had been supposed the *Diomède* had done. And that this was not peculiar to the British Navy is shown from the pains taken by the French captain to acquit himself of a charge of dishonourable conduct.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The incident is recorded in the *London Gazette*, March 28th, 1806.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LOSS OF TRINCOMALI

WHILE Suffren returned direct to Cuddalore to repair his ships Hughes remained in his position off Negapatam, and it was not until July 19th, thirteen days after the battle, that he went to Madras. The reason for his spending so long in that position instead of going at once to his base has been a subject of comment ; for it was owing to the repairs of the French squadron being completed before his own that Suffren, by the narrowest possible margin, was able to snatch Trincomali out of the hands of the British.

In none of his despatches does Hughes specifically state for what reason he spent so long in that anchorage, but from the general tenor of his thoughts as expressed in his letters written before the battle, and from expressions used in two letters written afterwards, the explanation appears clear. Hughes was in daily expectation of the arrival of Bickerton. In his letter of June 25th he had told Macartney that he was going to Negapatam "to watch their (the French) motions, neither seeking nor shunning an engagement till I am reinforced, which by all accounts I have received must be soon" : and this expectation was justified by the fact that the *Sceptre*, one of Bickerton's ships, actually arrived at Madras on July 13th. By remaining in this windward position, where Bickerton was almost certain to appear, he would ensure his joining him and the Commodore's not being exposed, with his six ships, to the risk of being intercepted by the superior French force from Cuddalore. Hughes well knew that neither Negapatam nor Trincomali was secure, for both were weakly garrisoned. He did not know

how long Suffren might be detained by his injuries, nor how soon he might again be at sea with an army able to attack either of those important posts. The enemy had one dismasted ship, the *Brillant*, which he had seen in tow : but ships could be refitted quickly—his own squadron with its dismantled *Exeter* had got to sea again ready for action within eight days after the shattering action of February 17th.

Further it appears certain that he expected to be able to put his ships into a fit condition at Negapatam itself with the use of the stores he had on board. It was not wholly for the purpose of the refit that he went to Madras at all, but for that of replenishing his greatly expended ammunition and the provisions and water of the squadron ; for it will be recollected that he had no opportunity of storing since he left his Coromandel headquarters in the end of March, that provisions and ammunition carelessly sent to him from Madras had been intercepted, and that water, in the quantity needed by the squadron for anything but a short voyage, was very difficult to obtain. At Back Bay, the only sources were wells with almost brackish water, from which in any case it took a long time to water a squadron.

It was not until he had lain several days at Negapatam that he found that the resources of the squadron were insufficient to make his repairs and that he would have to complete them at Madras. Thither he would have to go in any case for the provisions and ammunition : but his desire was to remain in his windward position as long as possible. On this he wrote, " Finding it impossible to repair the loss of topmasts and the other damages the ships of the squadron had sustained in the engagement without a supply of spars, fishes and cordage, and the ammunition of the squadron, as well as its provisions being nearly exhausted, I was under the necessity to proceed to this road (Madras) where our stores and provisions are deposited . . . when I left the windward station off Negapatam the French squadron

was at anchor off Cuddalore repairing their damages.”<sup>1</sup> And again, writing nine days after the arrival he says, “As both the ammunition and the provisions are now nearly exhausted, and every ship in the utmost want of a supply of water, it is my intention to proceed with the Squadron to Madras Road so soon as I can secure the masts and yards and put them in a condition to carry the sail necessary for that purpose.” Thus, it would seem, his remaining at Negapatam was mainly due to his desire to maintain his position to windward as long as possible in order to give security to Bickerton, whose six ships would otherwise be exposed to the danger of being intercepted by Suffren’s superior force—for by no means all of the French ships were out of action—in passing Cuddalore: and to the expectation of being able to refit the ships there from their own resources.

It has been remarked that Suffren needed nineteen topmasts, besides lower masts rigging and sails. Hughes had sixteen lower masts, seventeen topmasts, eighteen lower and top-sail yards and four bowsprits to replace or repair, besides his rigging and sails: and many of his spare spars on the booms had been shot to pieces. It may well be that he would have been better advised to recognise earlier that his resources were inadequate to effect these repairs, and that he would have got his squadron ready for battle sooner by proceeding direct to his base. But against doing so there was the undoubted danger of leaving his windward position and exposing his expected reinforcement to the risk of falling in with the superior force on the flank of its route to Madras. What would have been said of him if, believing Bickerton would soon arrive, he had abandoned his position to windward before it was necessary to do so and Bickerton had been intercepted and destroyed by the squadron at Cuddalore? No condemnation would have been thought too heavy. As it was, Hughes left Negapatam with his spars

<sup>1</sup> Hughes’s despatch, August 12th, 1780.

sufficiently secured for the voyage<sup>1</sup> on July 18th, and anchored off Madras on the 20th and there began to make as thorough a refit as possible, and to provision and water his ships.

One of the first communications which he received on his arrival was from Coote, who was returning thither after a short campaign with Hyder, in which he had inflicted a severe defeat on the Mysorean army at Arnee. As usual the General was anxious to bring about a combination of the efforts of the land and sea forces. "In three or four days more," he wrote, "I shall have had such an opportunity<sup>2</sup> when we must have under contemplation a plan of joint co-operation without which it is at present altogether impracticable for the army to act in any shape against our natural enemy."<sup>3</sup>

How necessary combination was had been amply proved by the whole experience hitherto. Since the battle of April 12th the army under Coote's command had been engaged in operations for the defence of Permacol and Wandewash, valuable British posts within the range of his striking power from Madras. Though Permacol was lost Coote had succeeded in defeating Hyder on June 6th at Arnee; but sickness and want of supplies had forced him to return to Madras without obtaining the decision he so greatly desired. The same reasons which on earlier occasions had prevented him from making an end of the campaign had again come into play. He could not feed his army. "It has been my misfortune," he said, "ever since I took the field, in the event of every success to have cause to lament my inability to pursue the advantages open from victory for want of an insufficiency of provisions." Had he possessed the means of subsistence and transport he could,

<sup>1</sup> The *Superb's* main yard was only finished repairing on the morning of the 18th.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. of meeting the Admiral.

<sup>3</sup> Coote to Hughes, July 23rd, 1782.

he considered, have driven Hyder up the Ghauts and ended the war in the Carnatic. He had, however, succeeded in isolating a part of the French forces who were now confined to the walls of Cuddalore.

During the same period the Southern Army under Colonel Nixon had achieved three brilliant victories and completely defeated the enemy's attempts to penetrate into Tanjore. The strategical sum-total of the operations there was that Hyder had been disappointed of his desire to cross the Coleroon. This in itself was important, though the efforts of the army were confined to defence. It was protecting Negapatam against attack by land, and preventing Hyder from cutting off the supplies which reached Madras from the South. But this carried matters no nearer a decision.

Madras was now in no danger from attack, and beyond ensuring the safe arrival of a convoy of stores at Vellore, no service of an important offensive character lay within the power of the army unless it could obtain the co-operation of the fleet in operations on the coast, where the line of communication and supply would lie on the water. One objective offered itself: Cuddalore. The recapture of this port would react upon British prestige, at this moment rather obscured. It would result in making an end of the bulk of the French army with a consequent weakening of Hyder's strength. It would deprive Suffren of a port where he could get supplies and of an important source of recruitment—the army—from which hitherto he had been able to replace a proportion of the losses in the actions at sea. The assistance of the squadron was necessary to protect the army's supplies which could not move securely by land partly for want of transport, partly because of their exposure to the active Mysorean cavalry.

Hughes, without disputing the political and military value of this proposed attempt, considered that that which should receive consideration first and foremost was the making of Trincomali impregnable and self-sufficing in defence.



As he had pointed out on almost innumerable occasions the success of the whole campaign depended upon command at sea, and command at sea, even disputed command, depended upon the base being secure. Until it should be able to hold out the squadron would have the impossible treble duty of covering it against the French and the Dutch, of giving protection to the Coromandel coast and its essential shipping, and of assisting the army. He reminded the Committee that "far other services fall to me than the matter of the security of Trincomali." It was necessary for him "to attend to the operations of the enemy squadron on this coast, which brought on the engagement of July 6th last, as the protection of Trincomali had brought on that of April 12th last."

He was convinced that the great object of the enemy was to capture the port. So long as there was an inadequate garrison—for inadequate it still was in spite of the pocket-fuls of troops which had been sent thither—the threat of its loss hung over him, and the squadron had no freedom of action. The only way to restore the freedom of the squadron to protect trade and assist the army was to send a strong reinforcement to Trincomali. This, therefore, should in his opinion constitute the foundation of any plan, a foundation which was essential and without which whatever plan were built must crumble and fall. Undoubtedly the loss of reinforcements to the French squadron which would result from the capture of Cuddalore and the French army there would be of value: but that result would be dearly purchased if, while the operations were in progress, the enemy was possessing himself undisturbed of a far better base, one in which he could winter from October to January when the British squadron must infallibly withdraw to Bombay, the only port where it could obtain shelter in those months and where the extensive and growing repairs of which it was in need could be made. In the absence of the squadron on the other side of India, the enemy if based

on Trincomali could spread his ships along the coastal route and intercept entirely the food supplies vital to Madras.

These points he urged, but with partial success only. The conclusion reached was one of those compromises so fatal in war. Instead of deciding firmly upon doing one thing and concentrating every effort upon it the Council attempted to do two with insufficient force for either. A small reinforcement of 200 troops, and those of a poor quality with a junior officer in command, was accorded for Trincomali; and preparations were made to move on Cuddalore without the assistance of the squadron. The troops were embarked on board the *Monmouth* and *Sceptre*,<sup>1</sup> the latter, a 64, having joined Hughes at Madras, and the two ships left Madras on August 1st, the day on which Suffren was leaving Cuddalore for Batticaloa. The relief thus escaped the risk of running into the French squadron by a narrow margin. They reached Trincomali in safety and the two ships returned, sailing from the port only a day before the arrival of the French squadron.

While there were acute differences of opinion as to what principal object the land and sea forces should adopt, a lack of co-operation elsewhere, and on a large scale, was seriously affecting the conduct of the war in India.

It has been shown how perversely the Council of Bombay had acted in the end of March, failing wholly to develop that co-operation with the Madras Presidency which Hastings

<sup>1</sup> The *Sceptre* was one of Bickerton's reinforcement. Her arrival alone was due to her having become separated, through an accident off the coast of Ireland. She proceeded to the appointed rendezvous, Rio, and there waited a month when she was joined by the *Medea* frigate. Deeming further delay dangerous, Captain Greaves sailed on April 23rd. Off the Cape the two ships fell in with the French convoy under Peynier, of 35 ships, carrying de Bussy's 2,500 troops with its munitions and stores for India, escorted by three of the line and a frigate, which had left Brest on February 11th, 1782. He snatched one prize, with 96 infantry and a cargo of stores, out of the convoy. Finding her a slow sailer, Greaves left her with the *Medea* and himself hastened to join Hughes. She was sighted and chased by the enemy off Cuddalore.

had tried to create. Obdurate they then were and obdurate they remained. Not a man would they move from Bombay unless 500 troops were sent to Malabar from the Carnatic. The situation in the Carnatic could not therefore be relieved by the proper methods of military action, and, as time went by, that situation was becoming more serious. Credit was lost, ready money was lacking—even the pay for the army which relieved Vellore had to be borrowed from the Agent Victualler's and Navy Storekeeper's funds, and the Army itself was shackled to the neighbourhood of Madras by its want of land transport.

To add to this, dissension was rife between Coote and Macartney. Although the General had been given, by order of the Governor-General, full and complete direction of the operations on land, Macartney continually interfered with and hampered Coote in his conduct of affairs. Although the correspondence between Calcutta and Bombay does not refer directly to the problems immediately engaging the attention of the Commanders on sea and land, the situation in India would be incompletely expressed if attention were confined to the strategy of the squadron and the army on the Coromandel coast alone. This was but a part—although the most active part—of a whole. The incident emphasises the importance of co-operation. Only too often the soldier and the seamen are blamed for their failure to co-operate, for the narrowness of their views. It is well that the results, when statesmen fail similarly to co-operate, should be remembered, and that it should be realised that the instances of their failures are no less numerous, and that, because they affect a wider sphere, the results of their failure may be even more far-reaching than those of the commanders.

We must now return to the immediate events at Madras where Hughes began his refit after his arrival on July 21st. In his letters he states that "the spars were only secured sufficient to prevent them falling in the short passage "

to Madras.<sup>1</sup> There he began his replacement of spars and rigging. The work was done in difficult conditions. There was a shortage of stores, for none had reached Madras since 1780, brought by the transport York; and although one storeship, the Porpoise, had come out from England, and stores were brought in the ships detached by Johnstone, all had been landed in each instance at Bombay and had remained there, Bombay being the refitting base. To add to this Hughes was very short of artificers, of whom there were but 68 in the whole squadron. Finally, his ships lying, as perforce they must, at some distance from the shore, and the surf, even at this season of the year, rendering the use of the native mahsulah boats indispensable, the whole of the transport from the shore to the ships had to be made by their means, carrying the cordage, ammunition and smaller stores, towing the heavy spars, and bringing off water, of which the squadron was in need. These boats were neither numerous enough to provide for all that was required, nor were their crews, able boatmen though they were, inclined to overwork themselves in this service. The ships' boats, like much of the spare spars, had been largely destroyed in the battles, and such as were available could only be used outside the surf.

Under these conditions the work proceeded slowly. Comparison has been made, to the disadvantage of Hughes, between the speed with which the French and his own squadrons were repaired. The actual time occupied by the British was six days the longer: and although the highest possible praise is not too much to accord to the great French commander—for the effort was his and his alone—there was a very marked difference between the conditions in which the repairs were executed: a difference which any seaman will readily appreciate. For while the British had a shortage of stores, a tedious and slow means

<sup>1</sup> The logs of the ship gave us no information as to what had to be done, nor how soon the ships most injured were ready.

of transport, and a scanty personnel of artificers, the French, though their wants were by no means fully met and had greatly to be improvised, had been joined off Cuddalore by some storeships from Mauritius, well filled with cordage and smaller spars, which, in that more sheltered anchorage, could lie alongside the men-of-war to transfer their cargoes. Their boats, such as were not destroyed, could go into the Coleroon river for water and bring it alongside, and aid in the transport of fresh food from the shore ; and through the excellent forethought first of Choiseul in building up a large increase of stores at Mauritius, and secondly, either of Suffren or of de Souillac at Mauritius, a large number of artificers had been sent from that Royal Dockyard. According to Hughes's information (which, in such matters, appears to have been fairly correct and, on this occasion, he calls "certain") these amounted to as many as twenty or thirty to each ship in comparison with Hughes's six or seven. It was not possible for the British Admiral similarly to recruit his repairing personnel. He possessed no power to compel the Company, to whom the Dockyard at Bombay belonged, to disgorge its workmen and send them to the other side of India for the service of the Royal Squadron. It may be that there are grounds for criticism in not having foreseen that repairing material would be needed at Madras ; that if Suffren or his colleague could anticipate this need it should also be possible for Hughes to make a similar anticipation. But it is necessary to remember that refitting at Bombay had proved practicable in the previous wars, even in that hard-hitting campaign of Pocock and d'Aché : that the ships needed docking, and that the occasion of docking was the convenient occasion for refitting ; and that Madras was, as all experience had shown, an unsuitable place for refit. Trincomali was good, but he held Trincomali by the slender thread of a weak garrison, and to entrust his stores, without which his squadron must infallibly be ruined, to an inadequately defended port, would have been the height

of unwisdom. It is, of course, easy to be wise after the event, and to discover more means than one by which his needs might have been met ; but it is better and more profitable to consider whether all these ideas would have come to any one of us, had we been in Hughes's position.

Whether or not Hughes's difficulties could have been reduced by forethought, the fact remains that the work took longer than the corresponding work off Cuddalore : that while Suffren's energy undoubtedly was the prime moving factor in speeding up the refit of his squadron, material causes also played their part ; and that Hughes fully expected to be repaired earlier than he was. The date he first proclaimed for the completion of the work and sailing in search of the French squadron was August 11th : that is, in three weeks after his arrival. During the first week of August he found that his expectations would not be realised, but he was not yet unduly anxious. News which had been received to the effect that the French had left Cuddalore on August 1st was contradicted, and this, he remarked in announcing to the Council the postponement of his departure, made immediate sailing of less importance.

This announcement produced a letter of strong protest from Macartney and the Committee of Madras couched in terms so hectoring in some parts, so offensive and sarcastic in others, that Hughes in reply described it as a "very extraordinary letter." That description is not inappropriate when it is considered that the Committee was vested with no authority over the King's squadron ; possessed no means whatever of forming an opinion as to the state of readiness of his squadron to engage a superior force ; and were themselves the persons who, by their consistent refusal to place Trincomali in a state of security, exposed it to danger from the French squadron.

It is far from improbable that the Committee had been galled by Hughes's frequent demands for a reinforcement of the garrison and his contemptuous references to their

employment of the army, and that they were annoyed at his refusal—his proper refusal—to consider himself their servant and subordinate, ready and anxious as he had always been, in compliance with his instructions, to be their colleague ; a position which they had never admitted.<sup>1</sup> It is also not unlikely that they felt that, if Trincomali were now lost, their failure to furnish it with the garrison it needed would risk being brought to light. Stimulated by these impulses, they appear to have hoped to provoke Hughes by reproaches to do that which they desired, and thus worded their letter in terms calculated to drive him to act contrary to his own opinion. The letter continued thus :

“ However extraordinary it may appear that a fleet, over which a decided superiority had certainly been so lately gained and some of its ships greatly disabled, should under many disadvantages be already able to refit and proceed to sea, your desire so often instanced of overtaking and engaging the enemy, whenever the public safety required it, leaves to us only to observe on this occasion to you that we consider the public safety never more concerned than it is at present that you should pursue the enemy’s squadron before they have time to make any successful attack on Trincomali or Negapatam, and before their junction with any of those reinforcements from France which already are arrived or are hourly expected in these seas.”

That the Committee were right in their opinion that time was of the utmost importance does not admit of a doubt. That they were not the judges as to whether the squadron was in a fit condition to proceed against the enemy admits of no less doubt. But theirs were not the terms, nor this the temper, calculated to produce the effects they desired. So far from promising to produce compliance they are of

<sup>1</sup> On this he wrote to Lord Hillsborough: “ As early as February 13th last the members of the Committee began to arrogate to themselves a dictatorial power over the officer commanding his Majesty’s squadron in the East Indies.” *Ad. Sec.*, 2, 750.

a character to arouse a spirit of opposition when addressed to a man like Hughes, whose authority the writers had continually impugned and who, very tenacious of the rights of his position, became the more tenacious with every attempted infringement of them. The result of such a method of conveying their views was indeed more likely to produce dalliance than despatch, if only to show that authority rested with the Admiral. To say this is not to say that Hughes purposely dallied or did not continue to press his officers and men to exert themselves to the utmost ; nor is it to defend a petty or contumacious attitude on his part in a matter of punctilio. It is merely to indicate that human nature is a queer and delicate instrument which, when badly played upon, produces undreamed-of and indefensible discords.

Nettled by the letter, Hughes replied next day. "I have on former occasions received the same kind of warnings from you, and have informed you that I was the judge when to sail, being myself only accountable for my conduct, and that, too, not to you. I again repeat my former answer to you that I shall proceed to sea with his Majesty's squadron under my command so soon as it is in a condition for service, and that I shall give your Board twenty-four hours' notice of the hour I intend to sail." He went on to tell them, much as he had when they inflicted on him their admonitory letter on February 13th, that he was "by no means ignorant of the state of public affairs in every part of India, and needed not your information." He reminded them that he had repeatedly, and only so recently as July 5th and 12th, pointed out the insufficiency of the garrisons of Trincomali and Negapatam, yet they had declined to spare men enough to secure those important strategical possessions preferring "to keep 10 or 12 thousand men and 60 thousand followers, at enormous expense, parading round the Mount, eating up the small supplies of provisions that come to Madras, without any material attempt upon the enemy."



In a part of their letter, the Committee had pronounced compliments, deserved compliments, upon Suffren: but these were not made to do honour to that Commander but to humiliate and wound Hughes. "The compliments," Hughes replied, "which the Committee are pleased to pay to Monsieur Suffrain are far from unacceptable to me. I believe him all they say; able, active and sagacious and more, brave. And yet, such are the sentiments of the Committee, they compliment Monsieur Suffrain at my expense."

Thus the relations between the Committee and Hughes were strained: as strained as those between the Committee and Coote and for much the same reason—the attempt of Lord Macartney and his colleagues to dictate the movements of the squadron, and the manner in which their views were conveyed to the Admiral.

On August 10th the two ships which had been sent to Trincomali with their small reinforcement returned. They had brought the news that they had sighted the French squadron off Trincomali on the 8th, proceeding to the southward. Further information from Captain Bonnevaux, who had been in command of the garrison of Trincomali and had returned from the port at the same time, indicated that their destination was Batticaloa: for it was known that a great quantity of bullocks had been ordered there for their use.

The deduction that was drawn from this was obvious. The French were going to Batticaloa, would provision there, and would then cruise off Ceylon to meet their outcoming reinforcement and, possibly, to intercept Bickerton. The Committee thought fit to administer a further pin-prick to Hughes in emphasising the necessity of the speediest pursuit of the enemy. This was not Hughes's view. Whichever course the enemy took, the first essential was that the squadron should be as efficient as it could be, whether he had to meet the twelve ships he had already fought or, still more, those ships reinforced by some uncertain number. An attack

on Trincomali, probable as it was before long, did not appear to him immediate: for the French squadron had already passed the port and gone to the southward. Thus, there should still be time for him to get there before the French. On the 16th he learned that as late as the 12th the enemy was still at Batticaloa, for the Coventry, on her way from Bombay to join him, had on that day fought the Bellone and chased her back to the arms of the French squadron lying in Batticaloa road. Finally, a reinforcement had reached the garrison which should therefore be able to hold out, even if attacked, long enough for him to come to the assistance in time.

On August 18th, his ships being now in "a tolerable condition," he announced to the Committee his intention of sailing on the morrow. He left the Medea to attend on Coote's army, protect the rice vessels, and cruise on the Madras-Calcutta route, and at daylight on the 19th he weighed. A dead calm fell which lasted all day, and not until the evening of the 19th did sufficient wind come up to enable him to clear the anchorage. His course to Trincomali lay south-east, in distance it was 280 miles. With the land and sea breezes from the south-westward and E.S.E.<sup>d</sup> he might not unreasonably hope to cover this distance against the northerly current of a knot to a knot and a half in a week, as the Monmouth and Sceptre had done on their way thither three weeks earlier.

Leaving Hughes making the best of his way to Trincomali, we may now return to the doings of Suffren during the six and a half weeks which had elapsed since the battle of Negapatam.

On the morning after the battle the French squadron weighed, as we have seen, and, with the dismasted *Brillant* in tow, sailed to Cuddalore. Suffren, like Hughes, was in want of many things and had extensive repairs to make. He needed lower masts, top masts and heavy anchors in particular. Some of his deficiencies had been partly met by

the capture of the vessels *Raikes* and *Resolution*, and more were provided by the storeships, already referred to, sent to him from Mauritius. Deficiencies, however, there still were, and these were overcome by his immense personal energy, his refusal to admit that anything was impossible. Rarely has the truth that man is greater than material been more abundantly shown. Admirable as his energy would have been if he had had under him a band of willing and enthusiastic subordinates, it was doubly admirable in the face of men who served him with sullen faces, whose whole attitude towards the campaign was perverse and discontented. The pleasures and profits of the *Isle de France* appealed more to them than the hardships of a prolonged campaign in the hot season on the Coromandel coast. But personal character triumphed. The *Brillant* was remasted. The other ships—fortunately for him less injured aloft than the British—were reconditioned. Use was made of any kind of material that the local resources could furnish and on August 1st, twenty-three days after the battle, the squadron was in a fit state to sail.

During these days Suffren was busy consulting with Hyder Ali as to the future of the campaign, and corresponding with the Governor of Colombo. Like Hughes, he also had a defensive to consider, and proposals to meet for the employment of his force. Governor Falck was still in constant fear of a British capture of Ceylon; Hyder Ali was no less anxious for his territory in Malabar—the territory the Bombay Government so studiously refused to attack—his fears stimulated by the news of the Mahratta peace and of the coming of Bickerton's squadron. If an attack were delivered at Calicut—the very attack Hastings had wished the Bombay forces to execute—he told Suffren he would have no alternative but to transfer his army from the Carnatic to defend himself on the Western coast of India. Thus, demands for protection against these dangers were pressed upon the Admiral.

Suffren's first object was to be joined by his reinforcement. He had no wish to invite another action until he had received this accession to his strength. Ready as he was to fight if the circumstances demanded it, he was no contemner, any more than any other great commander, of the need for the greatest superiority possible. He pressed the Governor to discover whether any of the Dutch merchant vessels lying at Tuticorin could be furnished with two tiers of guns and would join him and take station in the line. To crush Hughes before Bickerton's squadron reached him was his great desire. The Governor, however, was not of the same temper and nothing was done.

Sailing on August 1st he reached Batticaloa on August 9th, covering the 270 miles—practically the same distance as that from Madras to Trincomali—in eight days. Here he proposed to await his reinforcement. A week later (August 16th) a forerunner arrived—the *Consolante*, 40,<sup>1</sup> and five days later the *St. Michel*, 60, the *Illustre*, 74, and a great convoy loaded with munitions, stores and provisions, and carrying 600 troops, sailed into the road—the last a truly welcome addition to his crews. He now had fifteen ships fit to lie in the line against the twelve with Hughes; a marked and definite superiority. Now, if the English squadron was not already there, he could attack Trincomali with the troops and artillery he had brought with him from Cuddalore.

One of the most marked of Suffren's military traits was his promptness, his grasp of the value of time. It was in his careful husbandry and economy of time, in his never depreciating the value of a minute or a day, that his superiority over Hughes displayed and proved itself. He left as little as possible in this respect to the chances of foul winds and calms. Haste and ever more haste, to act quickly, dominated his thoughts. Therefore, when d'Aymar with his two ships of the line arrived at Batticaloa, Suffren's pre-

<sup>1</sup> She had been an East Indiaman, the *Elizabeth*, 36.

dominant thought was to get to Trincomali without the least delay. There were things which must be done: the troops re-allocated, the ships watered, some sick to be landed, fresh provisions to be embarked: for he could not risk a shortage of essentials in case he should fail to take Trincomali and also lose, as lose he might, Cuddalore. All this, however, he performed in the shortest time, and within forty-eight hours the squadron sailed from Batticaloa. Two days later it was tacking into Back Bay.

The very short range of the guns in the fort at Trincomali prevented them from offering any real opposition to the entrance and anchoring of the squadron. As some of the ships made their board close to the fort they received some shot, but once past there was no further opposition; and the squadron anchored about two miles to the northward, and out of the range of the fort.

The disembarkation was begun before dawn on August 26th, in the boats of the squadron. The troops, numbering 1,200 regulars from Cuddalore, 500 from the squadron, and 600 sepoy, together with some seamen, were quickly got ashore. The landing was covered by the cutter *Léopard*, anchored close in-shore to deal with any resistance, but no one stirred from the fort and the operation was allowed to proceed wholly without interruption by the inexperienced officer in command of the fort. Battering cannon and mortars were landed during the day, and the work of opening trenches was begun. The three following days were wholly occupied in raising the batteries. By the 30th this was completed, only once interrupted on the 27th by a sortie from the fort which burnt some houses covering a part of the siege works; and some slight losses—about 20 killed and wounded—were caused by musketry fire and shot from the fort.

Fire from some batteries was begun on the 29th and as others were completed it increased and held down the fire of the fort. At dawn on the 30th the whole siege artillery came into play vigorously, and this fire was maintained till





9 a.m., when it was stopped and Suffren summoned the fort. Although the garrison had suffered very little, and the only injury was the dismounting of the guns in the north bastion, the commanding officer prepared to surrender without offering any further resistance. Complaining bitterly that the Admiral had besieged him and battered a breach without first summoning him according to the laws of war—a complaint which Suffren met with the reply he had not done so as he would have considered it an insult to the English nation to have expected them to surrender without firing a shot—the commandant capitulated and handed over this fort, still perfectly capable of holding out, to the enemy, on conditions of receiving the honours of war. Suffren, with the prospect of an appearance at any moment of the British squadron, well knew he could not afford to lose time in bargaining, and he granted the terms, which included a passage of the troops back to Madras.

The next nut to be cracked, and a hard nut it had every appearance of being, was the Fort of Ostenburg, perched high on its wooded hill, approachable only along a narrow ridge, swept by the guns of the fort and affording no space for deployment. Although, owing to the parsimony of the Madras Council, who had met none of the demands for repairing its stonework, it was far from being as strong as it should have been, it was capable of withstanding a considerable assault if held by determined men and adequately supplied with water, ammunition and food: and he who should attempt assault must be prepared to lose his men. But for Suffren there was no alternative. The British fleet might appear at any moment, and there was no time either for investment or advance by sap. Assault he must; and therefore the arrival of a reinforcement of 260 fighting Malay troops, under a Dutch officer, from Batticaloa, was very welcome.

The advance began next morning, August 31st. Reaching the hill after a slight interchange of fire with slight losses,



Baron d'Agoult who commanded the troops summoned the fort, accompanying the summons with a threat unworthy of an officer of his great nation, that if the Commandant refused he would be sent as a prisoner to Hyder Ali.<sup>1</sup> Without further attempt at resistance, the Commandant surrendered, being granted as easily won honours of war as any man has ever earned.

Thus, in the brief period of four days from first to last, this position of the highest possible importance to the security of the British in India was lost. It is true that if Hughes had come earlier the siege might have been abandoned. But a naval commander is entitled to expect that his most important base is rendered capable of holding out for more than four days. Suffren, with far less at stake, designed to make it self-supporting for a minimum of fifteen,<sup>2</sup> and his measures for that purpose included a great deal of building, and a garrison vastly in excess of that meagre force which was all that Hughes had been able to extract from the short-sighted Select Committee of Madras.

With all possible expedition, therefore, Suffren proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for securing his capture, allocating troops, repairing damages to Trincomali fort, transporting provisions and guns. The need for haste was soon shown. At three in the afternoon of the following day—September 2nd—the reports of the firing of two guns announced danger. It was the appointed signal for the appearance of the enemy. The seamen who were ashore and some of the troops were quickly re-embarked; Suffren, who was ashore superintending the work, returned on board; and preparations were made for putting to sea. The topsails of the English squadron, apparently of sixteen or seventeen sail, were in sight to the eastward.

Hughes had at last arrived, but he was too late. The passage which had taken the Sceptre a week, and Suffren

<sup>1</sup> From a letter from an officer of the Héros. *Archives de la Marine.*

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to Falck, September 24th, 1782. *Colombo Archives.*

eight days, to complete, had taken him fourteen. The logs of his ships tell a melancholy tale of calms and drifting, of days when the current set the squadron twelve miles further off than it had been the day before. In the first seven days the actual distance covered in the direction of Trincomali was a total of but sixteen miles : and on the four following the average run was no more than fifty miles. Thus it happened that it was not until the morning of September 3rd, on the fifteenth day after leaving Madras, that he completed his passage of 280 miles and came off Trincomali. The sight that met his eyes was a grievous one. The French squadron, reinforced by three ships, lay in the Bay, the French colours flew on Trincomali Fort and on Fort Ostenburg. But the French squadron lay in disorder ; some had not their yards across, some were even bending sails, others were weighing. Hughes determined to attack at once and made the signal to engage the enemy as they came up with them. But the wind failed. It dropped to the lightest of breezes from the south-west and, such as it was, it placed the enemy to windward and unapproachable. So, while Hughes, hauling his wind, stood across the Bay, the French gradually got under way and came to sea to attack him.

#### HUGHES'S LETTERS ON THE GARRISON OF TRINCOMALI

The force sent from Madras consisted of Captain Bonnevaux (a Swiss Officer), 1 Lieutenant, 4 Ensigns, 4 Sergeants, 7 Subadars, 7 Jemadars, 35 Havildars, 35 Naiks, 6 Drummers, 3 Fifers, 7 Puckaties, 420 Sepoys : a total of 506 rank and file. "This corps, my Lord," he wrote on January 1st, "is composed of all the outcasts of all the corps at Negapatam, added to about 200 coolies who served under Lieutenant Abbott as prisoners but are now part of the 506 total, and very little service can be at first expected from such a rabble, however useful they may be made by discipline against a future period." This he told Macartney in order "that you

may be the more readily induced to send a reinforcement of men to garrison Trincomali, and with them a full proportion of ammunition : for I am truly sorry to inform you that not one cartridge of any kind is sent with this detachment."

On January 20th he wrote, "I still continue to believe that the forts which command the Bay and Harbour of Trincomali ought to be sufficiently garrisoned by the King's or Company's troops. The force now there . . . is very inadequate for the purpose."<sup>1</sup>

On February 4th. "I hope your Lordship and Sir Eyre Coote will agree to my earnest solicitations for furnishing a new reinforcement for the garrison of Trincomali for I can assure your Lordship I know the possession of that port to be of the greatest good consequence to the affairs both of the Nation and Company at this time. If such reinforcement is granted I will accommodate the troops in the best manner possible on board the squadron and land them there."

To Eyre Coote, on March 15th. "It is my intention to continue on board to use all possible diligence in getting our stores, provisions and water on board, and immediately to proceed off Ceylon for the protection of our expected reinforcements. I shall also hope through your friendship and kind assistance to carry a reinforcement of troops to be landed at Trincomali for the preservation of that very important place, the value of which is not well understood in general."

On July 5th (to the Select Committee). "The getting possession of Trincomali seems to me the point the enemy have at present in view and unless it is protected by our squadron it must fall into their hands, for the garrison now there is in no condition to defend itself long, if at all. Should the enemy get possession of that place the consequences will be of the worst kind. They will then be in possession of a

<sup>1</sup> One result of the inadequacy was that the important battery on Elizabeth Point (F), which commanded the anchorage, could not be manned, hence the squadron and transports could anchor without opposition.

harbour where they will winter from October to January and whilst our squadron without any place to shelter it on this side India is at Bombay, their cruisers will cut off entirely all communication between Madras and Bengal. This is a point of view in which I fear you never saw the possession of Trincomali, else more attention would have been paid to its being garrisoned in case of accidents."

July 14th, to Coote. "I have strong apprehension for the safety of Trincomali whilst I am to leeward with the squadron and all I can do will be to use every possible diligence to get to windward in time to prevent their attack on that place."

## CHAPTER X

### THE BATTLE OF SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1782

THE report that the British squadron consisted of sixteen or seventeen sail of the line reached the captains of the French squadron, who at once strongly urged their Admiral not to proceed to sea. To do so, they said, would compromise their possession of their valuable conquest. If they were beaten Trincomali would be lost. What then more wise, what more judicious, than to leave the enemy alone? For he could neither do them injury in their port, nor retake it.

Suffren did the obvious thing. The possibility that Bickerton had joined Hughes was not to be disregarded, and he sent out the *Bellone* to get accurate information of the enemy. The frigate soon returned with the intelligence that the British had only twelve ships in the line. All doubts, if Suffren had any, vanished at once. "If I had inferior force," he said, "it would be difficult to resist the temptation to fight the English; with equal force the honour of the flag would demand my fighting them; with superior force, we must fight. Repeat the signal immediately to form line and bear down on the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

The French line consisted of fifteen ships, of which thirteen were of the line. Hughes had twelve in the line of which eleven were of the line.<sup>2</sup> In Suffren's line of battle a change is to be observed in this battle in this disposition of his fast coppered ships. In the previous actions he had grouped them together in one body. He used them as a fast van division in the actions of February 17th and April 12th, and as a centre division in the action of July 6th. In the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in a letter from an officer of the *Héros*. *Archives de la Marine*.

<sup>2</sup> The 50- and 40-gun ships in each squadron being in the respective lines.

battle about to be fought he appears to have given up the idea of using a fast division, for in the order adopted—his “ordre naturel No. 1”—he placed two coppered ships in the van, one in the rear and the remainder in the centre. Hughes, as before, made no distinction between his coppered and uncoppered ships. His massing was based not upon speed but upon power. As on July 6th, he massed four of his five 70- and 74-gun ships in the centre, which, since Suffren's heavy ships were distributed in van, centre and rear, gave him a preponderance of fire there. Further, in this action the French Admiral's tactical instructions disclose no intention of a great concentration, no further development of that distribution which had given him such hopes of victory on February 17th when eight ships were massed against five. His only orders were for the *Vengeur* or *Consolante*—two, that is to say, out of three of his surplus ships—to concentrate on the British rearmost ship,<sup>1</sup> for, being unable to establish order, he could not make those tactical dispositions for which order was an essential preliminary.

In spite, however, of this, everything appeared favourable to a decision. He had a superiority of three ships, the weather gage, a good breeze, and the whole day lay ahead of him to bring things to a conclusion. More than this, he had yet another good ground for hope. He had rid himself of several of those Commanders who had failed him in his earlier battles and replaced them by younger officers in whose conduct he had confidence. Yet with all these hopeful factors he was once more to be disappointed of his longed-for victory.

As Suffren stood down towards the British line with the wind broad on his quarter, his antagonist, keeping his line fairly well locked up, bore up also, his ships under easy sail

<sup>1</sup> “Ordre à la *Consolante* et au *Vengeur* d'arriver (bear up) sur la queue de la ligne anglaise, et de détruire le dernier vaisseau.” From a letter from an officer of the *Héros*. Cf. also *Journal de Bord*: “At 11.30 signalled to steer E.N.E. and the *Vengeur* and *Consolante* to make their efforts against the enemy's rear.”

so as to ensure that there should be no laggards. Occasionally bearing up, occasionally luffing, Hughes kept steadily towards the E.S.E., his object being to draw the enemy as far as possible from his base. Throughout the forenoon Suffren pursued, sometimes edging down, sometimes bearing up or bringing to in order to get his line into order. He now experienced what Hughes had experienced on July 6th—the great difficulty of preserving station either in distance or bearing in a line of bearing on a lasking course. The ships in the van stretched away from the centre, the ships in the rear dropped astern and to windward, the centre outsailed the wings. In spite of repeated signals to make more sail or correct the line, a ragged line it remained, with its centre thrown up and wings thrown back. Different sailing qualities might well affect a regular advance, but, according to Suffren, these could not have prevented the ships from keeping up with the centre, for of three of the ships composing it which came into action simultaneously, he wrote, “The *Héros* sails very well, the *Illustre* passably, and the *Ajax* very badly. Nothing shows more clearly than this that all could have closed the enemy and kept the line.”

From half-past eight in the morning this pursuit continued, Hughes, under topsails, standing steadily to the E.S.E., Suffren endeavouring to get his ships into order to attack. At two o'clock he ceased bearing down, hauled his wind somewhat, and ordered the squadron to form in the wake of the van ship—the *Artésien*—in the hope that the *Artésien* would continue to lead on parallel to the enemy and thus enable a line to be formed astern of her. But even this effort failed, for the *Artésien* also luffed and this carried the van further away. In despair, Suffren decided to attack, line or no line, and ordered the squadron to bear up together and stand down on the enemy. “Since I cannot establish order, let each ship bear down on the enemy, choose his ship, and do as I do.” No tactical dispositions or movements, except that of doubling on the rear already alluded to,

could be made. To call attention to, enforce, and hasten the execution of his order, he fired a gun. Although his previous orders had enjoined pistol-shot range and the squadron, except the van ship, was still a good half gun-shot from the enemy, this discharge was understood to be a signal to engage; and the action began at that distance, many ships being still outside effective range.

The two rear ships of the French line obeyed their order and bore up for the Worcester in order to pass under her stern, but they carried out their movement in such a manner as to disclose prematurely their intention. Her captain, readily distinguishing what their intention was, at once threw his main topsail aback to block their way. The captain of the Monmouth, his next ahead, with equal good judgment, courage and promptitude supported him with a like action. The result was that these four ships dropped astern of the squadrons and maintained an action between themselves in which, as the French did not bear down further to leeward, and the British remained in their line, the losses were not great.<sup>1</sup>

In the van, the five French ships composing that division were considerably separated from the centre. The two at the head of the line had overshot the Exeter (the British van ship), the third was abreast her and at close quarters, the fourth abreast but slightly abaft her beam, and the fifth (Brillant) was coming up, firing her bow guns at the Exeter's quarter. The Isis, coming up, took off the fire of the fifth ship, but the Exeter, under the pressure of the Sévère's raking fire, had to bear up and turn to leeward, whither she was followed by the four other ships with whom

<sup>1</sup> British.	Killed.	Wounded.	French.	Killed.	Wounded.
Monmouth .	—	3	Vengeur .	1	20
Worcester .	6	16	Consolante .	3	8

These losses are for the whole battle, but they were apparently all suffered during this phase. The Monmouth was very much out about aloft and had several shot between wind and water. The Worcester lost her main topmast, had several spars damaged and her booms and the boats stowed on them were destroyed.



she continued in action single-handed until the *St. Michel* hauled her wind and left her. But the French ships did not press their advantage to the full at close range and crush the *Exeter*. Under the fire of this superior force the total losses of the *Exeter* were no more than six killed and nineteen wounded, and her principal damage was aloft, where her mainmast and foretopmast were crippled from bearing sail and her rigging cut to ribbons.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, the *Exeter* ran a full mile to leeward of the line: and at half-past three the French, when signalled to tack, towed their heads round with their boats—the wind being too light to tack or to enable the frigates to get near them and give help—and tried to get back to rejoin the centre which, by that time, was in a critical situation.

In the centre the engagement was fierce. Suffren, accompanied only by the *Illustre* and *Ajax*—the two leading ships of the centre having stretched ahead and joined the van, though they did not even get into action—attacked Hughes and his seconds. The ships did not remain long in this position but passed ahead and had therefore successively to engage the vessels forming the British centre as far ahead as the *Burford*. Thus the brunt of the fighting for the first hour took place between the three French and five British ships, the French, opposed by so great a superiority, losing <sup>a</sup>

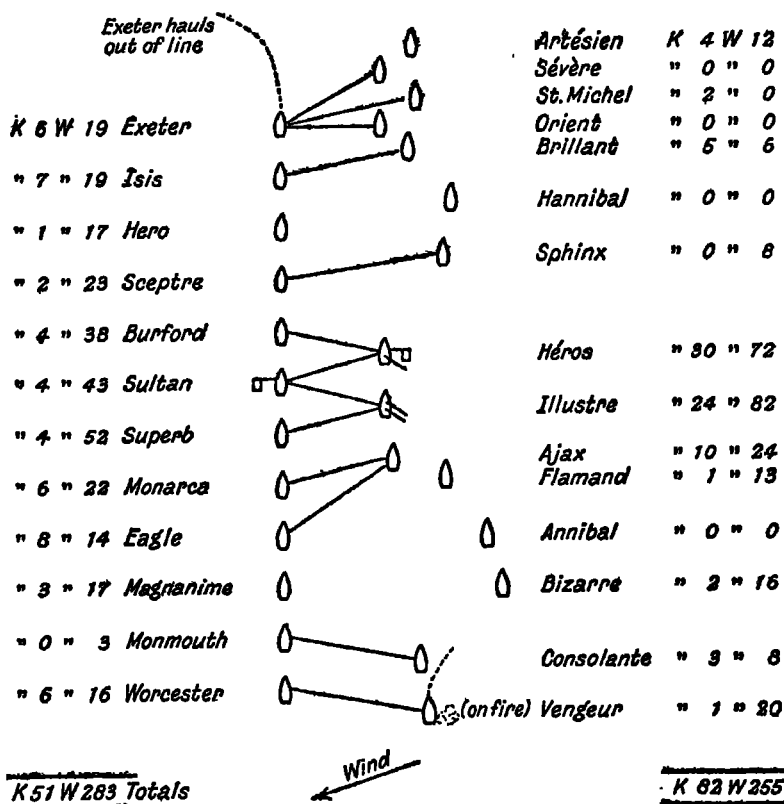
<sup>1</sup> The losses of the five leading French ships in the whole action, of which this formed the principal phase, were:

		Killed.	Wounded.			Killed.	Wounded.
Artésien	.	4	12	Sévère	.	—	—
Orient	.	—	—	Brillant	.	5	8
St. Michel	.	2	—				
<sup>1</sup> British.	Guns.	Killed.	Wounded.	French.	Guns.	Killed.	Wounded.
Burford	. 70	4	38	Héros	. 74	30	72
Sultan	. 74	4	43	Illustre	. 74	24	82
Superb	. 74	4	52	Ajax	. 64	10	24
Monarca	. 70	6	22				
Eagle	. 64	8	14				
		—	—			—	—
		352	26			212	64
		—	—			—	—
			169				178
			—				—

These are the losses in the whole action but, except in *Burford*, they occurred mainly at this phase.

## BATTLE OF TRINCOMALI, SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1782.

Diagrammatic sketch of preliminary distribution of fire.



*Notes.*—The positions are approximately those at about 3.30 p.m., when the centres came into close action.

The Artésien did not come seriously into action until after the shift of wind.

The St. Michel hauled out of action owing to water entering her gun ports.

The Vengeur was set on fire and ran short of ammunition. She hauled out of the line.

The Héros and Illustre were dismasted and had to be towed to Trincomali.

The Eagle, Monmouth and Burford were reported to be sinking, Superb and others making much water.

The losses shown are those sustained in the whole action. Those of the ships least engaged at this stage occurred in the fighting after wind changed.

the more heavily particularly in men. Aloft the Illustre lost her maintopmast and mizenmast, the Ajax her mizen topmast, and the Héros's mainmast was so badly wounded,

and its shrouds so cut to pieces, that it fell over the side later.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the position of the French centre at about half-past three, after an hour's engagement, was critical in the extreme. All three ships were partly disabled aloft, the van was out of supporting distance and practically out of action.<sup>2</sup> The wind had now nearly died away—a dead belt of calm had arisen between the land and sea breezes—and now it was that Suffren signalled to his van to tack in succession and rejoin him: which they were only able to do, as we have seen, by towing their heads round with their boats; and even that was hindered by the persistency with which the *Exeter* maintained her fire upon them.

Criticism of Hughes has been made for not going about at this stage, doubling on the French centre and crushing it. This, however, fails to take into account the lightness of the wind, the damage aloft, and the fact that if he should have wore—for the wind was too light to tack—he must have exposed his ships to a raking fire for a long time while the boats, if they could be got into the water, would be towing the ships' heads round.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The British ships were all heavily cut about though none of their spars fell. The damage, summarised shortly, was as follows:

*Burford*: Cut about aloft. Ship very leaky from shot holes between wind and water and making four feet an hour: ship reported sinking; two pumps going to keep afloat.

*Sultan*: Upper spars and rigging injured, but none disabled: mainmast badly wounded. Four guns dismounted.

*Superb*: Extensive damage in the hull. Some damage aloft.

*Monarca*: Fifty-five shot in the hull, leaking heavily. Much damage aloft.

*Eagle*: Making two or three feet an hour. Ship was already crazy for want of docking repair and all her seams were opened by the blows received.

<sup>2</sup> Their losses were:		Killed.	Wounded.	Suffren's comment on conduct.
Flamand	.	1	13	Mal.
Annibal	.	—	—	Très mal.
Bizarre	.	2	16	Mal comme toujours.

<sup>3</sup> The speed as recorded in the Master's journal of the *Monmouth* was 1·4 knots. Cunat (p. 223) remarks that the six ships in the van at this time, becalmed, "et ne purent se traîner là où l'honneur et le devoir les appelaient depuis longtemps."

With various slight changes in position the fight thus continued for another hour. Then came that change of wind from the land to the sea breeze which had so profoundly affected the course of events in the earlier actions. The sea breeze came in with a puff from the E.S.E.<sup>1</sup> Hughes at once made the signal to wear. It was obeyed instantly and in good order, but not without loss from the raking fire while the turn was being made.<sup>2</sup>

It was nearly six o'clock before the whole of the two squadrons were round on the other tack, the British, except the *Exeter*, in a good line, the French greatly scattered. The action was then renewed on the port tack in the oncoming darkness. Night fell shortly after. The leading French ships at length came to the help of their Admiral, whose main-mast at this juncture (6.20 p.m.) went by the board; but all order was now lost and the action was partial only. At a little before seven o'clock the French hauled their wind to the southward, and although fairly severe fighting continued in the rear, which was still in action, for another twenty minutes, the action was at an end. Hughes did not follow the enemy in the darkness.

The question naturally arises, should, or could, Hughes have endeavoured to renew the engagement next day? When the enemy hauled his wind to the southward, could Hughes feel that he had established a marked superiority over the enemy, and was he in a condition to follow up the battle? In his report he says: "The ships of our squadron had apparently suffered so much as to be in no condition to pursue them," and that "the *Eagle*, *Monmouth* and *Burford* were reported to me to be in a sinking condition and the

<sup>1</sup> Cunitz, in his admirably explanatory diagrams, shows the shift of wind taking place at four: the logs of the British ships show that it happened between five and half-past. Times are, of course, approximate.

<sup>2</sup> The *Burford* suffered particularly, as several of the French ships in the van which were already round on the other tack passed under her stern on the sea breeze while she was going round and punished her severely. She received most of her injury at this stage.

Superb and several other ships making much water from shot holes so very low down as not to be come at to be effectually stopped and the whole had suffered severely in their masts and rigging.”<sup>1</sup> The logs of the ships confirm the statement that the three ships first mentioned were making water heavily, that the Worcester had lost a topmast, the Exeter’s mainmast and foretopmast could not carry sail, and that the Magnanime’s mainmast, maintopmast and mainmast were so cut through that sail could not be made on that mast. Though he knew two of the enemy’s ships were crippled aloft,<sup>2</sup> he did not know what injury the remainder had suffered. What, however, appears principally to have affected his decision was the need for stopping the leaks : “ I was under the necessity,” he says, “ of steering with the squadron to get anchoring ground, in order to stop the shot holes under water.” “ Nothing is sure in a sea fight beyond all others.”<sup>3</sup> Should he have engaged afresh in a fight against a still superior force when three of his ships were making three to four feet of water an hour ? It is tempting for us, knowing how hard he had hit the three ships of the French centre, and having in our hands the facts of the conduct of the captains in the enemy’s van and rear, to consider what might have been the result of following up the action next day. For that we have sufficient information. But we have insufficient information to say to what extent the condition of the squadron would have justified following up the enemy and beginning a new action. Pursuit is effective largely to the extent to which the enemy is in disorder. When his cohesion has been broken, his force no longer capable of acting in combination, and by organized attack on its separated elements is forced to break into flight, pursuit, even with inferior numbers, becomes possible.

<sup>1</sup> Hughes’s despatch of September 30th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Héros* had lost her mainmast and *Illustre* her maintopmast and mizen mast. Both ships were towed back to Trincomali,

<sup>3</sup> Nelson’s memorandum.

“Ten thousand men will destroy an army of a hundred thousand in flight,” says Marshal Saxe. It is within the bounds of possibility that if the fight could have been continued in the evening of the 3rd, the disorder of the French squadron might have been converted into retreat, and retreat into flight. To break off action for injured ships in such a situation would have been a crime. But not to renew action when the enemy had had time to re-form is a totally different matter.

Thus it appeared to Hughes that a search for the enemy and a renewal of the engagement was not possible. The first thing to do was to go somewhere where it would be possible to stop the leaks, and the only fit place to do so was, he said, Madras. Thither, therefore, he shaped course; and there he anchored on September 9th.

When, after arrival in harbour, he had been able to make himself acquainted with the condition of all his ships, he came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to remain on the Coromandel coast. “Most of the ships,” he wrote, “must absolutely be docked to put them in a condition for the next year’s service, which is not to be wondered at considering the four severe engagements they have sustained within eight months.” And he was in need of over 1,800 men, for he was no less than 1,314 short of complement and had 544 sick on board.

Reviewing events since Hughes sailed out of Madras Road on August 20th, what had happened, what had resulted? He had failed to reach Trincomali in time to save it from capture: yet, even though we may feel, what we cannot prove, that it would have been judicious to have sailed sooner from Madras and risk an engagement against a superior force with a squadron incompletely repaired, we still see that under all normally-to-be-expected conditions of wind and weather, he would have arrived in time.

He might reasonably expect to cover the distance, as his own Sceptre had done (and though he did not know it, as

Suffren also had done) in about a week : a circumstance which merely confirms the common experience that no commander is entitled to calculate his time nicely, or by normal conditions ; but will profit most, as Suffren did, by seizing every moment, losing none. Ships and men may be lost, but may be replaced. Lost time can never be regained. Many a man might have spent a couple of days longer at Batticaloa to rest, water and victual D'Aymar's ships. If Suffren had done so Hughes would have fallen on him while the siege was still in progress.

But Hughes had not succeeded in saving Trincomali, nor can he be acquitted of a share in the blame for its loss unless it can be proved that it was a physical impossibility to have sailed so much sooner as would have ensured his arrival at least four days sooner. When he reached the offing he found the place in the hands of the enemy. He had neither superiority of force to obtain, nor troops to exploit, a decisive victory. His enemy, fighting near their own port, could (as the Dutch had so often done when the fortune of battle went against them) escape into the harbour if the action took an unfavourable turn. Was there then any good reason for fighting at that moment ? Could anything less than decisive battle give him the strategical results which are the aim of victory ? A decisive victory would give him back Trincomali, for if the fleet were driven off or destroyed, an army could be brought from Madras to retake the fortress. But would not an indecisive action leave the situation as it was, or possibly in even less satisfactory state ? The enemy had a secure port in which to repair his injuries, while Hughes had only the open coast and no further supply of stores, for those at Madras had been expended in the repairs after July 6th.

There was good reason for fighting. Morally, it was impossible for him to refuse action : that alone would furnish an adequate justification for his doing so. But there were other reasons. Even though with the force he had he may

not have expected to get a decisive victory, he could inflict serious damage on an enemy who was separated from his main source of supplies by many miles of water. By inflicting losses in men and material, both difficult for the enemy to replace, he would put it out of the enemy's power to undertake any operations on a large scale before the monsoon broke in mid-October: for the enemy's squadron might well be disabled for a month or more, as after other engagements, and by that time it would be too late for anything but sporadic efforts. He might have said with Nelson, that after the action the enemy "would do us no harm this year." If indeed he hit him hard enough, as Pocock had hit d'Aché, he might even cause his withdrawal from the coast, though this was a very remote possibility when the enemy possessed two such assets as Suffren and Trincomali. But the more injury he inflicted, the more difficult it would be for the enemy to institute any form of blockade of Madras or to stop those supplies of rice "on which," as he wrote, "both this settlement containing some hundreds of thousands of souls, as well as our army, depend for subsistence." The enemy, wintering as Hughes was bound to expect them to do, at Trincomali, must not be left with an uninjured squadron to do what they chose on the Coromandel coast. To inflict the utmost possible injury on the enemy was his bounden duty: and though, in the event, the enemy was able to appear and operate undisturbed on the coast earlier than expected, there is the strongest evidence to show that but for the injury he had suffered he could have produced a far more dangerous situation on the Coromandel coast in the intervening months.

That situation was dangerous enough, owing to the dependence of Madras upon food brought by sea, and the enemy's possession of the vital position at Trincomali. "As the enemy's squadron now winters at Trincomali there is every reason to fear their cruisers will be employed to intercept if



possible these supplies.”<sup>1</sup> To meet this danger he ordered four of his frigates,<sup>2</sup> short as he was of these vessels, to remain on the coast, albeit without the support of heavier ships, to cruise between Point Palmyra and Madras for the protection of this trade, and he had the satisfaction of being able to report in the following February that no want of provisions either for the people or the army had been suffered from enemy action, though grievous losses by famine followed from other causes, unrelated to the action at sea.

Hughes arrived with his squadron at Madras on September 9th. He had hopes that Bickerton might be there, for not only had the Sceptre joined him already, but he had met one of Bickerton's convoy at sea on September 2nd and there was therefore reason to expect that the Commodore would not be far behind. But to his disappointment Bickerton had not arrived. Hughes came, therefore, to the conclusion that Bickerton was remaining at Bombay, for he knew that his orders directed him to call there; and he expected that, arriving so late in the season, the Commodore would not think it worth while to come round to the Coromandel coast where he would only arrive at the time at which the squadron would have to leave the coast. As, however, there was a possibility that this forecast might be wrong, and that Bickerton might come, he must be warned of the presence of the French in Trincomali, and with this object Hughes immediately detached the *Active* to cruise off Ceylon between the Basses and the Friar's Hood to bid him to give Trincomali a wide berth. He warned Captain Mackenzie that the enemy probably would have cruisers in the same parts, and he impressed upon him that his principal object was to ensure Bickerton's safety. “I depend,” he wrote, “more on your fast sailing than your force. I therefore direct you not to hazard an engagement with any ship or vessel fitted for War.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to the Admiralty, September 26th, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Active*, San Carlos, Medea, Coventry.

<sup>3</sup> Instructions of September 11th, Hughes's *Secret Order Book*. Ad. 7, 736.

Hughes did not conceal the anxiety he felt in the event of Bickerton's taking the course of remaining at Bombay. It would be "a circumstance which should it take place may be attended with the very worst of consequences," for the enemy, already superior, was expecting another four, and possibly five, ships,<sup>1</sup> and without Bickerton's reinforcement the British squadron could not, if opposed, fight its way round Ceylon.

Whether, however, Bickerton joined him or not Hughes had now fully made up his mind that he must take the squadron round to Bombay, for without docking he could not have his ships in fit condition for service in the critical campaign which must inevitably settle the fate of India in the following spring. This decision he communicated to Macartney, stating that it was his intention to sail for Bombay as soon as his ships were patched up, "which will hardly be effected before the season for quitting this coast comes in."<sup>2</sup> Macartney at once called a meeting of the Select Committee, which entered a strong protest against his leaving. In this paper they expressed their conviction that Bickerton would arrive before the monsoon burst. His orders, they said, directed him to call at Bombay, and there he would have learnt that the British held Trincomali, while the news of its recapture by the French would not have arrived. He would therefore assume that Hughes could winter there and would hasten to join him. Therefore, and with good reason, the Committee represented that the Admiral should not as yet leave the coast on the sole assumption that the lateness of the season would induce the Commodore not to come round to the Coromandel coast.

Even, however, if Bickerton did not come, they urged that Hughes should remain throughout the winter, for

<sup>1</sup> *Fendant*, 74; *Argonaute*, 64; *Alexandre*, 64; *Hardi*, 54. The armaments are as supposed by Hughes. Actually the *Argonaute* was a 74 and the *Hardi* a 64. The *Alexandre* proved to be in so bad a condition on arrival at Mauritius that she was burnt.

<sup>2</sup> *Viz.* October 15th, according to the Station Orders since 1754.

to go would be to leave the supplies of Madras at the enemy's mercy. If the Admiral should depart "Madras may fall to the enemy through want of subsistence as well as means of defence."

Proceeding from his eventual to his immediate proceedings the Committee suggested that some of the less damaged ships might "be hazarded without impropriety" to assist Coote in the operations on which he was at that moment engaged against Cuddalore. To this proposal Hughes readily acceded, for he realised as fully as anyone the advantageous political, military and naval effects which would result from the capture and the surrender of the French garrison. Without a day's delay he ordered two fast ships<sup>1</sup> to sail at once for Cuddalore and assist the army. At the time, however, that this decision was taken, the Cuddalore expedition was already at an end. Coote had marched south with ten days' provisions only, on the assurance of Macartney that food supplies should be sent timely by sea. But although the rice ships, escorted by the *Medea*, sailed as intended, they were unable in the light winds and against the northerly current which still was running, to reach the army before its short measure of supplies gave out. The order to retreat had to be given on the 10th with Cuddalore almost in sight; and with Coote prostrated by fever, the troops reached Chingleput on their return on the 15th. On the same day the convoy returned to Madras Road.

There was, however, one other thing needing to be done. Coote was anxious that Negapatam should be secured before the season broke, for its loss would have led to the loss of the Southern Provinces. Three hundred troops were there-

<sup>1</sup> *Sceptre and Isis*. *Medea* was already with the army escorting its food supplies down the coast. Hughes's orders directed the Senior Captain to "co-operate to the utmost of your power with the said General in all things consistent with the nature of His Majesty's service and the safety of his ships under your orders." He added that a frigate was constantly to be kept to windward to guard against surprise. September 12th, *Hughes' Secret Order Book*.

fore at once made ready and embarked on the 20th on board the Sceptre and Isis which sailed with this reinforcement, threw it into the town, and returned without mishap.

The squadron being now back in port, and the army in a condition to move once more, the question was discussed of whether a final blow could not even now be struck against Cuddalore. Macartney, opening the discussion with the observation that the affairs of the Company were never in a more critical condition, said that "some impressive action" was needed at once. Although there might well be a risk to the squadron in its inferiority, the stake, Cuddalore and all that it represented, warranted risk, and that risk must be taken if there appeared to be the smallest chance of success. No enterprise was closer to Coote's heart than this and he supported the proposal in writing, with the indispensable qualification that the operation was only practicable if the fleet could remain with the army long enough to complete the business. "The co-operation of the squadron being the grand point upon which everything hinges, and whereof the late return of the army from, I may say, the gates of Cuddalore exhibits a very striking proof, I take it for granted that the Admiral having once embarked (*sic*) the assistance of the fleet towards the accomplishment of the object in view, will not, unless in the case of the most imminent danger, withdraw from the service until our united efforts shall have come to an issue."

Hughes, however, could not give this nearly unconditional undertaking. Three reasons prevented him from doing so : time, the need for reconditioning his squadron, and the fact that this could only be done at Bombay. Nowhere except Bombay were the stores, the labour and the docks, without the use and service of which, in his opinion, the squadron could not possibly undertake another campaign. How long the siege or assault of Cuddalore would take could not be stated by the General ; but what could be stated was how long the weather would allow the fleet to remain

on the coast, and from that it could be seen for how many days the squadron would be able to co-operate with the army. The fleet must sail, at the latest, on October 15th. After that date the monsoon might break in a storm such as wrought such havoc to Labourdonnais on October 13th, 1746, and until mid-January there was always the risk of such another gale. Steevens, on December 31st, 1761, had suffered the loss of four ships dismasted, two foundered, and one wrecked out of his eight ships of the line : and these were well-found ships. Steevens, moreover, when he took the great risk of remaining off Pondicherry at that season knew that there was no enemy squadron, much less a superior one, near the Bay of Bengal.

Thus the 15th was the latest date to which he could safely postpone his departure. Before going he must water, for the voyage would take at least five weeks,<sup>1</sup> and for this with the limited appliances at Madras and the swell on the coast in October, he must allow a week. The squadron must therefore be back at Madras by October 8th at the latest. It was now September 21st. The army, he was informed, would not be ready to move for another six days—the 27th : and it would not reach Cuddalore till October 3rd. Could the capture be effected in five days, and after that could the army be independent of the squadron ? If the squadron were caught in the open coast, as Labourdonnais's and Steevens's had been, and if it suffered losses as they had suffered, India would be at the mercy of the French who would retrieve at sea the loss of Cuddalore on land.

Thus, the critical season was one predominant factor in the situation. There was another—whether it was advantageous to fight an action at sea in the circumstances of time and repairs and geography. An attack upon Cuddalore would in all probability bring Suffren to the coast with his

<sup>1</sup> It actually took two months, largely owing to wounded spars and having a damaged ship in tow.

superior forces, by now as fully refitted as the British. If a battle were desirable no better method of forcing one could be devised, for Suffren must either come to the help of the army or see it destroyed. But a battle was not desirable, not because of fears of the tactical results but of the strategical results which would follow from anything except a decisive British victory. For Hughes to engage again at this season with the gales close upon him, his own port, Bombay, far away while the French had Trincomali close at hand, was to court disaster. Close action meant heavy damages; and to beat round Ceylon and up the Malabar coast in October and November with a squadron of ships some of which would be crippled aloft after an action, was not a thing a seaman would contemplate. Nothing would play more effectually into Suffren's hands than to fight an action, however indecisive, at this time and in these circumstances. In these words he brought his reasons to a conclusion :

“ To enter with it (the squadron) on further service at this period of the year is absolutely risking its final destruction, both from the enemy, who may be further reinforced,<sup>1</sup> and from the weather. This is risking too much for the conquest of Cuddalore : for on the existence of the squadron depends the whole of the Company's possessions as well as the national interests of this country. If it be ruined, not the Carnatic only but every possession in India of the English will follow, and vain will be any effort to resist when the enemy become complete masters of the sea.”

To Coote, between whom and Hughes no shadow of a quarrel ever fell,<sup>2</sup> he wrote in amplification : “ It is needless for me to point out to you, who are well informed, and have heretofore experienced the advantages of a squadron, how this total dependence arises. Very few men in this country

<sup>1</sup> *Vide ante* p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> Except upon one occasion when Hughes desired to retain more troops on board the squadron than Coote thought could be spared from the land : but the troops were left on board.

but knew and felt that on the preservation of His Majesty's squadron depends the possession of the Company's possession in it. Shall I then, who command that squadron, be accessory to its ruin ? " And he went on to remark that a squadron damaged in a gale and creeping past Ceylon would be a gift to an undamaged squadron sallying out on it from that port ; while a squadron damaged in action and caught by such a gale as may occur at this season, would invite an almost certainty of serious losses.

Did Hughes " make pictures " ? Did he overestimate the need for docking and re-masting, the chances of the French being reinforced, the probabilities of bad weather and its results ? The work required both in his own squadron and in that of the French furnishes the answer.

Coote, appreciating to the full that Hughes alone could be a judge of what his squadron could do, did not press for the attack. He replied, assuring the Admiral that " the same line of co-operation which has hitherto actuated me to afford every assistance in my power towards manning the squadron will always be adopted when it can be pursued consistently with our very existence and defence on shore." <sup>1</sup>

The Committee, though determined to do all in their power to prevent the squadron from leaving the coast, made no answer to the Admiral. A fortnight passed without a further open attempt to force his hands. Then, on October 5th, a letter dated the 3rd reached Madras from the agent at Negapatam. A fleet of seventeen ships was in sight—Suffren was about to attack the town—the place was actually being attacked. And simultaneously news came from Bombay that Bickerton had arrived there on September 15th, and had sailed for Madras on the 19th.

On receipt of this news the Committee peremptorily

<sup>1</sup> The assistance of the army, particularly the 98th and 78th regiments, had been of the highest importance. Up to the time of his arrival at Madras Hughes's losses had been 298 killed in action and 1,073 wounded : but a great number of the wounded died, and at this time—September 1782—his total loss in dead was 978 : and he had 650 men in hospital.

demanded that Hughes should sail at once and attack the enemy. The Admiral curtly replied that in the conditions with the monsoon due upon him, without a port in which to repair after an engagement, and against an enemy who had a secure port at Trincomali, he declined to comply with their requisition.

On receiving his reply the Council cast aside all semblance of any restraint. They reminded him that the importance of Negapatam had so much impressed him in the previous year that he had urged its capture and had remained throughout the monsoon to effect it. Now its fall was imminent, and that fall might result in the loss of the whole of Tanjore and the Southern Province and even involve Humbertstone, who was now moving from Calicut to Palliachery. All the arguments relating to leaving the enemy on the coast, the blockading of Madras and the reduction by famine were repeated. Although the enemy now had the use of Trincomali, Hughes had an ample choice of other bases. There was Nancowry, in the Nicobars, with a harbour that would hold the fleets of the world and was "about the same distance as Trincomali,"<sup>1</sup> there were Acheen, the Andaman Islands and the Hoogly. Proceeding in a still more violent strain they remarked :

"If the safety of His Majesty's ships were to be the sole or even primary object of His Majesty's Commander, they should never meet the enemy at sea, or even go out of Bombay Dock. Ships of war have been on sundry occasions sunk designedly with a view to retarding the progress of the enemy, and when the safety of the British possessions on this coast depend on your remaining in its neighbourhood and on your attacking immediately the enemy, the risk attending His Majesty's ships is not a sufficient reason for declining the service for which they were intended. If many of them are weakened and shaken, many of the enemy must (be) and in your declared opinion are, much more so.

<sup>1</sup> The distance of Nancowry from Madras is over 700 miles, of Trincomali 280.



. . . We therefore have a right to call on you, Sir, in the name of our mutual Sovereign and of the British nation to which the territories in the possession of the English East India Company are by Parliament declared to belong, and in the name of that Company (whose representatives you are by several Royal Charters *strictly charged and commanded to assist whenever thereunto required*), to give us that assistance which is in your power, and which we conceive to be essential to those interests which are committed to your and our care."

Proceeding further the Council remarked that Bickerton would soon arrive. This alone should be enough to persuade the Admiral at once to proceed. The recapture of Trincomali would then be more easily effected. The troops brought out by Bickerton would reinforce his crews. Reinforced by five ships and these troops the enemy's squadron could be totally defeated and the siege of Trincomali at once taken in hand before the enemy could put it in a state of defence. That special port needed to winter in would then be available. Forgetting altogether their consistent refusal to comply with Hughes's reiterated requests to themselves to furnish an adequate garrison to Trincomali, which would easily have held it, they proceeded: "The advantage and the necessity of this measure is so strong upon our minds, especially as the want of that port is given as a reason for your going to Bombay, that if we had no hope of the arrival of Sir R. Bickerton we should be inclined to offer you to embark on board of divers vessels now in this road, the greatest part of the European troops now here, and a sufficient number of sepoys to accompany them to attack with the more effect M. Suffren on the coast, and that you might get before him to Trincomali and have the same advantage in getting possession of that place which Admiral Barrington with a few ships of the line at anchor had of contributing to the capture of the island of St. Lucia in sight of a much greater number of ships of the line under sail."

Suffren, they remarked, made an answer worthy of his character when he said that the value of his ships was nothing to the object for which they were sent to India and that he would keep them here as long as they were able to swim and until he could get possession of a place to refit them in the ocean should be his harbour. "It may be right," they proceeded, "to be taught even by a foe, and not to mistake the means for the end you were meant to answer, the defence of the British Possessions which you seem willing to put to a great hazard rather than put your ships to hazard. . . . The purpose of refitting to be ready in the spring will be defeated if you abandon the defence this year, so that the enemy gets possession as well of the British territories on the continent as well of the Island of Ceylon. We desire you to recollect that you are as strong in ships, and we shall make you as strong in men, if you promise not to leave us as when you last engaged the enemy, who is diminished in ships and men and is, as you declare and we believe, beaten and shattered, but retaining indeed his spirit and activity. We give you notice that we expect the moment you sail for Bombay that the enemy, following the plan that is said to have begun at Negapatam, will attempt to burn or sink every vessel in these roads. Should the grain and other vessels not arrive here before your departure the very assistance by which you will be enabled to abandon us will deprive us of the means of landing the grain before the arrival of the enemy, which may occasion the destruction not only of the grain, but of all the tonnage by which we might hope to receive more. We declare to you that in our opinion the loss of Fort St. George and consequently of the whole coast of Coromandel is among the probable consequences of your departure for Bombay before the arrival and landing of our supplies, and that such a conduct on your part will be virtually to deliver the British possession in India into the hands of the enemy."

In the reply dated October 8th which Hughes made to this

indictment, he did not attempt to deal with the various points in any detail, for neither in the reasons they gave for his going to attack the French at once off Negapatam, nor against his going to Bombay to refit, had they adduced anything new, except their proposals for wintering in the ports of the Bay of Bengal. Attractive as these proposals appeared in a purely geographical sense, in that they would afford shelter for the squadron, they were useless as bases since they could not support or supply the squadron with its needs. The harbours, as harbours, were excellent. But neither spars, stores nor food were procurable at any of them. As to the Hooghly, though a new harbour had been found there by the surveyors, and though it was said that Calcutta would supply the fleet, there was no dock, and docking was in his opinion particularly necessary. Nor were there stores to refit his ships. Of the nine ships which began the campaign in February not one had a serviceable mast. The Andamans were foodless, water was not procurable in sufficient quantities; and again there were neither stores nor artificers; and artificers were indispensable.<sup>1</sup> Finally Acheen was in hostile hands. He could go there, as he could go elsewhere: but he could not feed and refresh his men nor procure spars for his ships. In fact, as he wrote later to Hastings, "No harbour in your Bay, nor Tappanooly, could in any degree have furnished the means of making of His Majesty's ships the least serviceable for this season, and their companies greatly reduced in action and by ten months' constant fatiguing duty without proper refreshments . . . would have been ruined by the scurvy and other diseases and not been equal to navigating, much less to fighting the ships."<sup>2</sup>

Nothing, in fact, had in his opinion happened since October 6th, when he had said that he was not going to invite an

<sup>1</sup> Suffren's situation was different: he could obtain food and stores from his allies the Dutch in Batavia and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes to Warren Hastings and the Council, February 1st, 1783.

action with the enemy on the verge of the breaking of the monsoon, without a secure port, to alter the opinion he had then expressed.

As to the news that Bickerton had sailed from Bombay, he did not believe it to be true, but if it should prove so to be, and the reinforcement should arrive on the coast before the monsoon broke, he would then pursue such measures as he thought proper. He took a strong exception to the style and criticism employed "which I am convinced your station in the Company's service cannot justify to me," and to the use they had made of quotations in which sentences had been separated from their context "as if the originals from which they were extracted had passed through the hands of a compiler for a news-paper," but declined to be drawn into argument. "At the same time," he wrote, "I desire it to be recorded in answer to your letter on this occasion that I am as zealous for the preservation of the British Dominions in the East Indies as you can possibly be, *I mean to comprehend the great whole, of which this settlement is but a part*;<sup>1</sup> and as you deal so much in retailing by pieces my sense of Public Affairs when offered to you, I shall reserve what I should otherwise communicate to you to that Enquiry with which you have so unhandsomely threatened me, and proceed with unabated zeal to my duty to the utmost with the force entrusted to my charge for the protection of the British Dominions in the East Indies. But the manner of best effecting this great object is with me, of which I cannot even suppose you in any degree competent judges."

He could not resist hitting back. He told Macartney and his colleagues that when the enquiry did take place, the loss of Trincomali would be found to be the result of the inaction of the Madras Council; and abundant and overwhelming is the evidence of the truth of this. Politeness, if any there had been, was dropped in his final broadside.

<sup>1</sup> The italics are Hughes's.

“ Insignificant as you are in the scale of the national and even the Company’s interests, it will I believe be thought by all men highly unbecoming in you to attempt to hector or bully the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty’s forces by sea in this country into a compliance with your selfish measures for the preservation of yourselves from dangers at the risk of the destruction of that force on which the whole of the British Dominions in India greatly depend for preservation.” They were now, he pointed out, crying out for the security of Negapatam : but if Negapatam was in danger the fault lay with themselves, who, he reminded them, had sent all the Dutch prisoners, who now would constitute a danger to its security, back to Negapatam, in order to save their own pockets.

The picture of this interchange of offensiveness is not edifying. Such matters are not, but they are instructive. They show the human factor making itself felt as the most influential of all the elements in war, transcending that material factor which tends so much to dominate the minds of superficial men. One can imagine Hughes with his bulky body sweltering in his cabin as the Superb rocks softly in the long glassy swell off Madras without a breath of wind to cool or disperse the damp oppressive heat. He sits there, the tobacco juice dribbling out of the corner of his mouth, as he turns over the situation in his mind. How does he see the situation ? Suffren is once more at sea, short, it is said, of one ship. What is he doing ? Report says that he was attacking Negapatam five days ago ; but this appears to be highly improbable, for he can have brought no landing craft and without these no descent upon the coast is practicable, and there are none there for his use. Even, however, if he should land, the place should hold out, for the garrison has recently been reinforced with another three hundred men. Lastly, although news takes but two days to travel, not a word of confirmation of such an event as the landing of an army has reached him. In fine, he does

not believe it. At a mere bombardment from the sea the fortress can snap its fingers. No, he need not be worried about Negapatam.

Is it a fact or a mere rumour that Suffren is at sea? The evidence is certainly circumstantial. The *Bellone* was cruising not long since off Cuddalore. Cuddalore? Is it not thither that Suffren may be gone, threatened as it was but a short time ago by Coote's army? When Hughes had been asked to co-operate with Cootes, was it not for the reason that the army's sea-borne supplies needed protection? Was not the proposed attack looked on as the most probable means of provoking an action at sea, if an action were desirable? But if Suffren is at Cuddalore what harm can he do? If the proposed attack were in progress he might indeed defeat it; but the attack has already been called off. The French cannot stay there long, for the weather will send him back to Trincomali in a week. No. Suffren's appearance off Cuddalore spells no danger to Madras. Time is against him.

But putting all these on one side, are the Council not fundamentally right that he ought to bring the enemy to action, whether Negapatam be safe, or Cuddalore unimportant? Is it not a fact that if he quits the coast he leaves Madras exposed to blockade and the certainty of surrender? He has before him a petition signed by eighty-five inhabitants of Madras, merchants and Company servants, praying him to remain: the existence of the settlement, the safety of the coast, depend on the squadron; there are not six weeks' provisions for the garrison and the European inhabitants. General Stuart adds his voice. In "his private and public capacity" he implores the Admiral to remain until the grain ships are discharged. If the grain now on board or on its way suffers any loss, "the Army he now has the honour to command and which is equal to any Army by France or Hyder to be produced—in short the Sheet Anchor of India by land, must, and General Stuart declares it to

Sir Edward Hughes upon the veracity of an honest man to be (*sic*) disbanded for the want of rice only: and at the very time when the enemy will strike their stroke by land: he means the third week in December next.”<sup>1</sup> What answer is there to this? Are these fears imaginary? Suffren has apparently repaired his damages, and, wintering in Trincomali, can descend when he chooses, after the first burst of the monsoon, and either bring an army with him or isolate Madras by sea. Is it then not obvious that the destruction of the enemy’s squadron is the cure for all the prospective ills?

It is obvious. But what are the prospects of destroying it? Four actions have been fought. Each was indecisive. After each, both squadrons, more or less equally balanced, were more or less equally injured. What reason has he to suppose that a fifth battle will result differently, that some unforeseen influence will come into play which affords him a justifiable degree of expectation that this next time he will sweep the enemy out of these seas? St. Vincent had not yet said that “two fleets of equal force never can provide decisive results unless they are equally determined to fight it out or the Commander-in-Chief in one of them misconducts his line,”<sup>2</sup> but Hughes, with his experience, might well so estimate the chances. The battles had shown that the strength of the squadrons was approximately equal, when measured in the aggregate of all the elements—command, skill, courage and material. Neither had been able to gain a substantial advantage hitherto. Why should he suppose that his experience would be altered in a fifth battle?

And if it were not altered? If the result should be the same as before and the battle end with some wounded ships on each side, no surrenders, no losses of ships, what then

<sup>1</sup> General James Stuart to Hughes, October 10th, 1782. *Ad.* 1, 164.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Jervis to Mr. Geo. Jackson, July 31st, 1778. *Life of Augustus, Viscount Keppel*, vol. ii, p. 50.

would the situation be ? The wounded French withdraw into Trincomali, where, sheltered from the coming gales, in security they repair their injuries, as they have apparently repaired them since September 3rd. The British withdraw to Madras and have there to lie on a lee shore, within a few days of the break of the stormy season, with their masts and rigging cut to pieces, their hulls leaky, and no stores with which to repair them. Even if they are fortunate enough to survive the weather in a season when even well-found ships avoid the coast, in what condition will they be when the time comes for the resumption of actual operations in the spring ?

The Council have reminded him that he stayed on the coast last year, and that he then had made no objections to so doing : and they deduce that what was practicable then is practicable now. But the conditions are wholly different. Then he had six ships, well manned, clean, fully provided with anchors and cables. Now, he had a foul squadron, with shot holes underwater, short of ground tackle, greatly damaged aloft and without a spare spar on the coast for replacement.<sup>1</sup> The situations are not in any way comparable. The Council had suggested he should go to Nancowry, Acheen or Negrais instead of Bombay. But how were his ships to be caulked, where would he find the new spars he needed, and where, above all, were the necessary fresh food and water to be got in those places, Acheen being in hostile territory ?

Such, judging by his correspondence, appear to have been the considerations that passed through his mind. That Madras would be exposed to danger, and grave danger, if he left the French unopposed and in temporary command on the coast, he was but too sadly aware. But the danger was nothing to that which would result from the loss of the squadron, or from its being unable to regain command

<sup>1</sup> His great spars required dockyard work : he had neither the material nor the artificers for their replacement or effective repair.



next year. Provided it could do that, losses could be recovered. It was not that he considered the safety of the squadron an end in itself, as the Council in their frights and fears supposed. It was that to remain on the open coast jeopardised India permanently and probably irrecoverably. Suffren, who had nothing but his squadron at stake, could afford risks: he had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Hughes had not only his squadron. He had India in his charge.

His decision was made, and neither the abuses of the Council, the prayers of the inhabitants nor the appeal of Stuart shook him. Wait he certainly would, until the last moment: which, in consequence of the need to protect the unloading of the rice vessels he extended to October 20th, when, being the period of full moon, blowing weather might reasonably be expected: but remain on the coast for the winter months and go without a refit, he would not.

A day later the weather became uncertain. On the 12th, 13th and 14th it got more threatening. So heavy a surf now was breaking on the shore that no laden boat could pass. Watering the ships was stopped in order to use the boats to land the grain. On the 15th the wind came up in the morning from the north-east and a gale was clearly approaching. By noon several ships had parted their cables, and two hours later Hughes made the signal to cut or slip. In a full gale the squadron put to sea and under close-reefed canvas clawed to sea to the south-eastward. The wind increased greatly after dark, the sea grew heavier, and in the early part of the night the labouring *Superb* lost first her mizen, then her mainmast, both masts going where they had been wounded. By great good fortune the gale abated towards the morning, for by then the ship was in imminent danger of fatal loss with seven feet of water in the hold and her open seams taking in the water faster than her pumps could expel it.

A return to Madras was now out of the question. Most

of the ships had but one anchor left, several had lost top-masts. About 150 sail of craft, large and small, among them practically all of the rice vessels, whose unloading had been the principal object of remaining there, were wrecked.<sup>1</sup> Detaching the frigates he had ordered to remain on the coast for the defence of the coastal trade, Hughes shifted his flag to the Sultan, took the dismasted *Superb* in tow, and stood on to the southward. Off Pedro shoals the gale freshened up again and the crippled squadron was nearly driven on shore, a providential off-shore slant of wind alone saving the ships.

The bad weather continued throughout the voyage round Ceylon, but the squadron came through without other loss than its spars and anchored at Anjengo on November 25th. There Hughes got his first definite news of Bickerton. The reinforcement after all had gone to Madras, where it had arrived with a convoy of ten Company ships, with troops, four days after Hughes had sailed, but the weather proving too bad to anchor, Bickerton had at once retraced his course to Bombay, passing Hughes unseen at sea. From Anjengo Hughes went on to Paniani where Tippoo with his army was investing a British force under Colonel McLeod and there he left a couple of frigates to assist the troops.

He was now short of water—for the bad weather had prevented his completing—and he had 450 men down with scurvy. These he landed at Tellicherry, watered his coppered ships first, and sent them on to Bombay with the *Superb* in tow of the *Magnanime*. How he should now get his worn ships repaired quickly was his immediate problem, for Bombay could not compete with so much work. The solution lay in Goa. Thither therefore he went in the Sultan, taking with him the *Monmouth*, *Hero* and *Sceptre*, and there the courteous Governor, Dom Frederico Guthurme

<sup>1</sup> The distress was so great that many people perished of starvation : but more ships were sent from Calcutta—a fleet of victuallers, which arrived without mishap, *Annual Register* 1783.

de Sousa, granted him all he asked, placing the artificers of the Royal yard at his disposal. His two months' voyage came to an end on January 17th when he sailed in to Bombay road, where he found Bickerton with four ships<sup>1</sup> all in need of repair after their long voyage. The fifth ship of Bickerton's squadron, the *Africa*, had been sent with transports carrying a body of troops under General Mathews which had sailed to the Malabar coast to reinforce McLeod, who was engaged in making that long deferred diversion in the Malabar coast. At last his refit could be begun.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gibraltar, Cumberland, Defence, Inflexible.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter from Hyde Parker to Lord Sandwich, written on February 11th, 1772, the following remarks occur, illustrating Hughes's attitude towards leaving the Coromandel Coast in October 1782 :

"Your Lordship I believe is not unacquainted that the ordinary course of the winds there is to shift from the north-east to the south-west periodically in April and October, each prevailing six months, and that these changes are frequently attended with terrible hurricanes. In the year 1748 on the shifting of the north-east monsoon to the south-west in April, Mr. Boscawen lost in Fort St. David's road the *Namur*, *Pembroke* and *Apollo*, with almost all their crews. In the year 1762 on the shifting of the south-west monsoon to the north-east Mr. Steevens lost the *Sunderland*, *Acquitain*, *Newcastle*, *Queenborough* and *Protector* fireship, very few of their people being saved, besides that most of the remaining ships of the Squadron were dismasted and rendered unfit for service. This event happened in Pondicherry Road at a time (if the enemy could have made their advantage of it) they might not only have saved the place, but would certainly for some time have put an end to the struggle for the superiority in that country. In the year 1764 Mr. Cornish met with the third hurricane in October ; but the ships putting to sea in good time, they escaped with the loss only of their masts, anchors, boats, etc. Fortunately the lives of the crews were by this means preserved, but the *Norfolk*, *Weymouth* and *America* were little better than wrecks."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SQUADRONS' WINTERING PLANS

BICKERTON's reinforcement had taken an exceptionally long time in coming, for the decision to strengthen Hughes had been made in December 1781. When it became known that the French were sending nine ships and many troops to India orders were given to prepare 4,300 troops and an escort of six of the line and two frigates. But although de Bussy had sailed in November, Bickerton did not leave England until the beginning of February: a gross delay. His instructions, dated January 22nd, were to proceed with all despatch to Fort St. George, keeping well to the westward of the ports of France and Spain, and forty to fifty leagues to the westward of Madeira and the Cape Verdes. If he should need refreshment he was to call at Rio; but if he did so he must make the shortest possible stay. He should round the Cape in lat.  $37^{\circ}$  or  $37^{\circ} 30'$  to get a good westerly wind, and in reaching the Mozambique channel, which he was expected to do in June or July, he was to send a frigate ahead to Bombay to procure intelligence of the situation in India against his arrival at the Banks off Bombay. As an additional precaution the East India Company despatched a messenger by the overland route to order that the vessels of the Bombay Marine were also to lie at sea to meet him with intelligence. According to the information he would thus receive, he was to proceed down the Malabar coast to join Hughes, whose cruisers would probably be on the look-out off Ceylon, but failing other news he was to go direct to Fort St. George.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Secret Instructions, January 22nd, 1782; and to E.I.C., January 25th, 1782. Signed by Lord Sandwich, H. Penton and Lord Mulgrave.

Bickerton had a tedious voyage. He called at Rio and there waited five weeks owing to sickness. When he sailed on June 3rd he had with him five of the line and a frigate, the *Sceptre* and *Medea* having parted company earlier in gales off Ireland. Off Bombay on September 3rd he met one of the Bombay vessels with despatches telling him that Hughes had fought three battles, with a distinct advantage in the third, and that the *Sceptre* had reached Madras. Though he saw that he must join Hughes as soon as possible he could not proceed until he had filled up with water, and he therefore put into Bombay, watered with such expedition as the indifferent resources of the place admitted, and sailed again four days later. But as he had been informed at Bombay that a squadron of six French ships of the line was expected at Goa—an incorrect report apparently diffused expressly to mislead—he kept his convoy in company, thereby retarding his passage. At Anjengo he received the bad news that Trincomali had been lost, “but not knowing the situation of either fleet after the action, I pursued my course to Madras, giving a large berth to the south-east part of the Island of Ceylon,” a course which caused him to be missed by the *Active* which was looking out for him. When near Ceylon he heard of the violent gale which had struck the coast on the 15th and had forced Hughes to sea, and when he came off Madras it was still blowing hard. He saw that the squadron was not to be roadstead, so sending the transports into harbour he made a stretch to seaward to discover Hughes in the offing, but seeing nothing of him he concluded that the Admiral was probably gone to Bombay, and that his proper course was to return to Bombay and join the flag there. Thither, therefore, he at once sailed.

Hughes's intention now was to refit his coppered ships first and take them round to the Coromandel coast without waiting for the remainder, the slower vessels. This he hoped he would be able to do by February, and thus to have

a sufficient force of fast ships to impose a check upon Suffren. The uncoppered ships<sup>1</sup> which had been over two years off the ground were in want of greater repair under water and would take longer : he proposed therefore to take the opportunity of coppering them, intending that they should follow him when ready.

It has been suggested that at the end of this campaign Hughes was a beaten and a despondent man. The writer finds nothing to substantiate this view either in the Admiral's actions or his words. He had now a squadron of seventeen sail, five of which would not be ready for a long time. He did not intend to wait for them. The enemy, so far as he knew, had fourteen, and was expected to be joined by either four or six more when the Mauritius reinforcement arrived, giving him a possible eighteen ships, while other reports gave him twenty. Yet Hughes was confidently preparing to return to the other coast with twelve sail of ships to oppose a certain fourteen, and a possible twenty ships of the line. This is not the spirit of a beaten man.

We must now return to the movements and the thoughts of the French Commander. When night and confusion had brought the battle of September 3rd to its indecisive conclusion, Suffren tried to collect his squadron together and shaped course for Trincomali. Once more he was a disappointed man. The victory he had hoped for had not been obtained. Three of his ships were badly crippled, he had lost over 300<sup>2</sup> men, the confidence he had reposed in his new commanders was shaken ; and those of his other commanders who had remained were as bad as before.

Daylight on the 4th found him not far from Batticaloa, with his flagship and the *Illustre* in tow. Light winds from the E.S.E. made the passage to Trincomali slow and it was

<sup>1</sup> The forecast from which the above is quoted was made before he knew of the loss of the *Orient* and before the *Bizarre* was wrecked ; which reduced Suffren's ships of the line to twelve. The fourteen does not include the *Consolante*, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Killed, 82 ; wounded, 255.

not until the morning hours of the 7th that the squadron turned in Trincomali Bay. Then fortune struck the French commander a cruel blow. The 74-gun *Orient* ran ashore near Foul Point.

Every effort was made to warp her off, but the rocks had pierced her bottom. There was nothing to do but salve her guns and spars, and even that was no easy task as she lay heeled over on her bilge, and a heavy swell bumping her on the rocks. Nevertheless it was done, and the work of repairing the three most damaged ships was begun. The foremast of the *Orient* served to replace the *Héros's* mainmast, the *Bizarre* gave the *Illustre* her mainmast and took the *Consolante's*, the *Consolante* replacing hers from a Dutch ship.

Almost the first news Suffren received when he got into harbour was that of Coote's march on Cuddalore, and of his only awaiting his provisions by sea to open the siege. The French garrison consisted of no more than 1,200 white troops and 1,500 sepoys, Hyder was at least a fortnight's marching distant, Tippoo, to the westward of Pondicherry, could give no help. The situation looked bad, but before he could act he must get more recent news of the actual state of affairs. He therefore sent the *Bellone* on the 11th to get news, and in the meantime urged forward his repairs for readiness in the event of active help being needed. Bad weather greatly delayed his repairs, and as the days passed without news he became increasingly anxious for Cuddalore. Scraps of information filtered in, all of which showed that the place was in danger; and still the *Bellone* did not return. Writing on September 22nd to de Castries he said, "The direct and indirect news I have from the coast redouble my regret at being unable to sail thither, but at this moment I have only ten ships, the *Héros*, *Illustre* and *Vengeur* will not be able to leave until the 28th,"<sup>1</sup> and he deemed that it was not possible to go with ten ships only

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries, September 22nd, 1782. *Archives de la Marine*.

of which but one was a 74. This view of so admittedly bold an officer as Suffren that it would not be possible, even in the imminent danger to Cuddalore, to attempt to render help to the garrison with ten undamaged ships against Hughes's force of twelve, some of which he knew were badly damaged in the late action, furnishes a comment upon the unbridled attack made upon Hughes by the Select Committee for not proceeding with his force to succour Negapatam.

The Bellone returned on the 23rd with the reassuring news that Cuddalore was not in any imminent danger, but that the garrison was short of food and would welcome a reinforcement. Suffren had with his forces the troops of the legion of the Isle de France and the Bourbon volunteers ; and these he decided to return to the army in the Carnatic. With this object he sailed on September 29th.

We have seen that a report reached Madras that Negapatam was being attacked. It was one of those hasty rumours which run riot in war. The French squadron did indeed sail into Negapatam Bay on October 3rd as reported :<sup>1</sup> the 20-gun armed ship Prince William carrying munitions for the army in Tanjore was sunk, and some polite shots were exchanged at long range with the shore fortress, but nothing more. Suffren passed on, and on the 4th he sailed into Cuddalore road. There grievous bad fortune attended him. As he had lost the Orient while returning to Trincomali, so here the Bizarre, while coming into the anchorage, ran on a shoal. All the efforts to haul her off failed and next day she became a total wreck. Suffren was now reduced to a numerical equality in ships, but an actual inferiority in gun fire to Hughes. But he had the advantage that while he could retire, if injured, to a safe anchorage Hughes could anchor only on the open coast : and the season

<sup>1</sup> A report that Coote had returned to the Mount reached Trincomali on the 12th (*Journal de Bord*, p. 176), two days after his retirement : but Suffren was still anxious for the security of the army, as the information was not certain (*Archives. Letters*, September 22nd and 23rd).



of the gales was close at hand. "The season will not allow me to remain long," he wrote to the Governor of Colombo, "it would not be prudent to risk being there at the October full moon"—the precise date beyond which Hughes had said he himself could not safely stay.

The loss of the Bizarre was followed by unpleasant news: Bickerton had arrived at Bombay with five of the line and had sailed for Madras on September 18th. He might therefore appear at almost any time within the next fortnight and then Hughes would have no less than 17 ships to his own 12—an uncomfortable reversal of the favourable situation of superiority he had hitherto enjoyed since he arrived on the coast.

Although Suffren was able to pay only this flying visit to the coast, his appearance was of great value. It was not only that he landed troops and thus reinforced Cuddalore. He did more. He reassured Hyder Ali, whose heart was growing sick, and whose trust in the French was evaporating owing to the long delay in the appearance of de Bussy or his army. Throughout the summer hopes had been held out to him of the imminent arrival of the French General with five thousand men and five men of war, but as month had succeeded month and they failed to appear he had begun seriously to doubt whether they were ever really coming. The appearance of Suffren, whom alone among the French Commanders he held in high honour as a fighting man, restored his shaken confidence. How dispirited he was becoming in August or September is shown in a letter of October 3rd from the French agent at the Nabob's camp to Suffren. In the two and a half years since he first attacked the Carnatic, he told M. Piveron, he had lost twenty thousand horses, many elephants, camels, cattle and men, and he had spent immense sums of money. His army now was greatly reduced, in want of food, and worst perhaps of all, was discontented and inclined to be mutinous. He dared risk no attack on the British until de Bussy arrived and if the

English reinforcement should arrive first, all his constancy, all his efforts, would prove to have been wasted.

The French alliance was in fact proving a burden to him ; without it he could make a much needed peace. But the small French force at Cuddalore demanded his protection and if he removed his army the British might destroy it. If it were not for the need of covering it he would take his army to the unravaged and rich northern provinces where he could plunder and recuperate his men and his treasure, while in another direction, if freed from the French incubus, he could go to Malabar and defend his possessions there which were being attacked by the British. "Jugez donc ma perplexité !" <sup>1</sup> he exclaimed.

In this situation of perplexity Suffren's presence came as a steadying influence. It restored Hyder's wavering confidence. At Suffren's instance, Piveron assured Hyder that de Bussy was expected at the end of November, although it was known that he would not be able to leave Mauritius until the first week in December. Although he had been disappointed often before with the results of the flattering tales of Bussy's early arrival with which Piveron had sustained him, he reposed sufficient faith in Suffren to believe that this time, at least, the story was true ; and he appeared to consent not to leave the Carnatic on his desired marauding expedition to the North, but to remain in the Carnatic for the happy reunion with the French army.

At the same time that he sent these reassurances to the Nabob, Suffren took the opportunity of asking him to cut some large timber for the spars of the squadron, of which he was in great need. This Hyder engaged at once to have done for him in Mangalore, and to have the spars brought round to his base. He even said that he would arm five or six ships of from 40 to 60 guns, to join the squadron <sup>2</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> Piveron de Morlat to Suffren, October 3rd, 1782. Cunat, *Vie de Suffren*, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> Cunat, pp. 365-9. Hughes, when at Mangalore in 1784, found ships capable of mounting guns in this number building on the slips.

a reinforcement which might have been more of an embarrassment than a succour in a fleet action, but which would have proved awkward customers for the vessels of the Bombay Marine to tackle.

The question of where Suffren should winter was now his great concern. Although he had got Trincomali, all was not plain sailing, for there were many disturbing factors. In the first place, there was a great lack of food. Bengal had placed an embargo on rice exportation, and there was a consequent shortage in Ceylon. There was a lack both of cattle and fresh provisions for his men and already his sick had not been able to get enough fresh food in Trincomali. To be shut up in Trincomali was, as he expressed it, to die of hunger. Next, there was the problem of the West Coast of Ceylon, for the safety of which the Governor of Colombo was again almost morbidly anxious. Cochin, the last Dutch settlement on the Malabar coast, was still held; but the Governor was certain that an attempt by the British would be made from Bombay to take it. Its loss would mean the loss of absolutely essential food; for it was from Cochin that much of the rice of Colombo and Galle, now unobtainable from Bengal, was drawn. That ominous Mahratta peace had moreover set free ample British forces, so what, urged the Governor, was more obviously in the interest of the British than to descend on Cochin or on the West Coast of Ceylon? The solution he proposed to Suffren was that he should winter at Cochin. His appearance there would ruin the English plan, he could get provisions there in greater quantities than in Ceylon, and he could get shipwrights to assist his repairing. "*Jugez, Monsieur,*" he wrote, "*si je n'ai pas les motifs les plus urgents à vous recommander la conservation de Cochin. Les Anglais feront l'impossible pour nous priver de ces ressources, persuadés que l'article de vivres ne pourra se remplacer d'ailleurs.*"<sup>1</sup>

Where he should winter was thus a problem that was

<sup>1</sup> Falck to Suffren, September 16th, 1782.

giving Suffren hard thought, a problem rendered even more difficult by uncertainty as to when de Bussy would arrive at the predetermined rendezvous, Acheen. For wintering at Trincomali there were the excellent reasons of its security, of the fact that he could begin his refit there at once, be early on the Coromandel coast, and also ensure the security and use of his base for the next year's campaign. Against doing so there was the difficulty of provisions—a difficulty he called “effrayante”—the danger to which the Dutch possessions, and therefore Ceylon, would be from the British, and the fact that he would be doing nothing to prevent the Bombay army from attacking Hyder's possessions in Malabar, for which, as we have seen earlier, that Prince was becoming increasingly anxious in consequence of the Mahratta peace. There was also the further objection that until the season in which operations could begin opened again in earnest he would be in a state of inaction, serving no purpose: and a state of inaction was odious to his active personality. Moreover, if he stayed at Trincomali, there would be doubt of his effecting his junction promptly with de Bussy.

To go to Acheen was similarly undesirable from the point of view of Malabar. But on the other hand, he could get food there, the Dutch could assist him with spars, he would be on the spot when de Bussy arrived, and, finally, he would be on the Coromandel coast earlier than he could from Trincomali, as he would not have to beat up the coast against the wind and the strong current, and could begin acting against the line of supply of Madras at the earliest moment. But then this would leave Trincomali isolated and in danger of recapture. Yet another question arose in his mind. The English, he was sure, could not remain on the open coast: might they not go to Acheen themselves? And if they did, to what grave risks would not de Bussy be exposed? He would run straight into their arms and there was no way of warning him of this danger. “On all sides,” he wrote, “I see nothing but danger and uncertainties. However,

if I get no other news I shall go there (Acheen). I shall leave 2,000 troops here with provisions and ammunition. I do not expect the English will attempt its capture. The Governor thinks he will be secure if he has time enough to work at the defences."

His mind was also busy as to what operations would best be undertaken when de Bussy should arrive. If Hyder was still in Arcot, the troops should be landed at Masulipatam, in order to operate in country which had not already been pillaged and could therefore furnish food. He would take Masulipatam and Paliacotta and advance down the coast to Madras, there to join the armies of Hyder and Cuddalore. The capture of Madras would be the final stroke, the highway to peace.<sup>1</sup> Attacked from the South by the Army from Cuddalore, from the North by de Bussy's, and from the West by Hyder's with their immense quantity of artillery, Madras should fall in twenty-five days.<sup>2</sup>

Such then was his decision. Risks must be run. He must take the chance of the English being unenterprising on the Malabar coast or against Trincomali, for the risk of de Bussy being attacked at Acheen was greater. To Acheen, therefore, he decided to go. There he would ensure meeting de Bussy, with whom he could confer and plan the campaign for the following spring. But he took the wise precaution of spreading the report that he intended to winter in Trincomali; and to give colour to it he embarked officers on board for transport back to their corps in that garrison.<sup>3</sup>

There was no need to remain a moment longer at Cuddalore than was necessary for saving as much of the Bizarre's equipment as possible. The weather began to be threatening on the 14th. On the 15th the same gale which struck Hughes at Madras broke at Cuddalore and the squadron put out into a heavy tumbling sea with the wind at north-

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Castries, September 22nd. *Archives de la Marine*.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to Piveron de Morlat, October 6th, Cunat, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup> Cunat, pp. 243-4.

east : but this lasted but a short time and he made a fair passage with light winds to Acheen, where he arrived on November 2nd.

There, after making friendly overtures to the local ruler, Suffren set actively to work to repair his ships. Frigates were sent to the Dutch ports in Batavia to fetch spars and food, leaky ships were caulked or in part repaired, the *Vengeur* was sent back to Trincomali to be put on the careen—"without Trincomali," he wrote later, "we should have lost the *Vengeur*." But all his hopes of an early opening of a military campaign on the Coromandel coast and of the strong reinforcement to his squadron for which he had been hoping, were swept away by the intelligence<sup>1</sup> which reached him on November 24th. De Bussy's army and fleet, and himself in person, had been crippled by a "putrid fever," which, costing them 1,500 lives in the troops alone, had detained them still longer at the islands, so that they could not be expected before February, by which time Hughes might well be back on the coast. Two convoys bound for India under de Soulanges and de Guichen had been intercepted and taken in the Bay of Biscay. Finally, Rodney had beaten de Grasse at the Saintes on the very day when Suffren was struggling with Hughes off Provedien. The outlook was indeed gloomy.

The effect which this further deferment of de Bussy's arrival would produce upon Hyder could only be unfortunate in the extreme. The first thing to do was to account in some satisfactory manner for the delay—he could be told that the news of the taking of Trincomali had altered de Bussy's plans but that he would soon arrive, or that the change was due to ensuring the meeting of the squadron with the army. Thus Suffren felt that he must now make an appearance on the coast with the squadron as soon as he possibly could, not only in order to injure the British in

<sup>1</sup> From Mauritius by the Company ship *Duc de Chartres*, which had visited on its way Galle, Trincomali and Cuddalore.

their vulnerable grain supplies to Madras, but also to keep up the spirits of Hyder Ali. He had already received from Batavia many of the heavy spars he needed,<sup>1</sup> and was in a condition to take his squadron, with one or two exceptions only, to the coast. "I shall go to the mouth of the Ganges to destroy the convoys which the enemy will despatch as early as he can to replace the losses suffered in the storm, and to try to capture some prizes to victual Cuddalore, Trincomali and the squadron."<sup>2</sup> To reduce delays to the utmost he wrote to de Bussy suggesting that instead of going direct to the arranged rendezvous, Acheen, he should make Galle and there get news of the situation. If he should find that Suffren was blockaded in Trincomali ("ce qui pourra être," for Hughes had now seventeen ships to his twelve) de Bussy might disembark his army in Malabar, and fetching a wide compass round Ceylon so as not to be sighted, go direct to Cuddalore. He expressed at the same time his view that it was possible that if de Bussy did not arrive till March, he might then find the squadron in the Malabar coast, for the enemy's superiority was now so great that there only it might be practicable to effect anything. But the immediate danger was that the delay in de Bussy's arrival would result in Hyder's making a premature peace: and unluckily, the news of the delay and of the illness of the army had already reached Cuddalore. "A censorship ought to have been enforced to prevent this. . . . It is annoying that we have not thought of preventing any writing and forbidden all communication." But the injury was done. All that could now be done was to repair it as far as possible by an early appearance with as much of the squadron as possible on the grain routes to Madras.

One final point here deserves attention—the contrast between the amount that was known of the enemy's move-

<sup>1</sup> Brought by the *Pourvoyeuse*.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to de Bussy. Undated, but evidently either on November 28th or 27th.

ments on each side. Before Suffren left Cuddalore he knew that Hughes intended to go to Bombay. The whole of the discussions between Hughes and the Council were public property—we have seen that a petition to remain was presented to him by the merchants. Hughes, on the other hand, had no inkling of where Suffren would winter, and Suffren with wisdom and forethought, when he found that he could not do so at Trincomali and must go to Acheen, took every possible step to convey the impression that the former would be his wintering port.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE SPRING OPERATIONS, 1783

It will have been observed that the idea which first informed the plan of sending a naval force to the East Indies underwent a change during 1781. Originally, the purpose of a squadron in the East was diversionary. In the war plans of the years between 1763 and 1777 the object of the fighting forces of France was to invade England. To effect that invasion, superiority to any sea forces which might oppose the passage of the army was required. For this, concentration alone was not a sufficient measure, for even if every single ship both of France and of her prospective ally Spain were brought into concentration, the result would still be a force insufficient to overcome the resistance the British fleet could make to the passage and landing of an army. The fruitless cruise in 1779 was later to furnish evidence of this. Hence, it was necessary to weaken the British concentration by diversions, of which the attack in India was one.<sup>1</sup>

The defection of Spain after 1779, with the engrossment of her attention upon the recapture of Gibraltar, rendered it hopeless to expect that superiority would now become possible in the Channel. Invasion was no longer the measure by which England could be subdued, and other theatres where vital injury could be inflicted must be sought. One such theatre was the West Indies, where the British Islands were economic assets of the highest importance. The loss of the West Indian trade would be vital. The campaign of 1781 opened with the despatch of de Grasse's strong reinforcement the object of which was a decision in that region. It was accompanied by the squadron under Suffren

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Introduction.

destined for the defence of the Cape of Good Hope. It was necessary for the Dutch possessions to be protected in order to prevent England from recovering, in the East Indies, what she might lose in the West ; and as the Dutch could, or would, do little themselves, it was in the direct interest of France to assist her ; and we have seen also that the Cape was the key to Mauritius, as Mauritius was a key to India. Suffren, therefore, had been sent to protect the Dutch, to preserve the power to use Mauritius, and to prevent England from making countervailing conquests. While it would be assuming too much to suppose that the action of sending a squadron had also the deliberate object of protecting the Dutch islands by the threat of an attack upon India, thereby putting the British upon the defensive, in practice it had that effect : an instance of the use of the offensive as a measure of defence.

Thus far, then, the governing idea of the use of the French naval forces in the Eastern seas underwent a change. The object was no longer diversionary : it was defensive. But as the year 1781 passed, the notion, earlier advanced by de Bussy, that the East Indies was a theatre which offered a promise of striking a decisive blow, began to receive attention. Suffren's successful reinforcement of the Cape was an encouragement. De Bussy was now again called upon to give his ideas ; and towards the autumn of 1781 his view of India as a theatre of more important offensive operations, was taking definite hold. Though minor territorial successes had been scored in the West Indies, it was obvious that a really decisive result was a long way off. France was already beginning to feel the strain of the economic effects of the effort she was making, and the need for a not too distant peace was obvious to her statesmen. A decisive stroke was necessary.

The result of the deliberations in the autumn of 1781 was the decision to make a great effort in the East Indies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further details, *vide* Appendices II, IV and V.

An army was now to be sent with a definitely offensive object : and in order to keep the intention secret, and thus assure superiority at the decisive point, the forces were to sail in echelons. The first, consisting of two ships of the line<sup>1</sup> under M. d'Aymar, sailed from Brest in November 1781, called at Cadiz to embark de Bussy under an assumed name, and thence proceeded to Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, where it was to wait until January 15th, to be joined by three more ships under M. de Soulanges. This detachment, sailing in company with de Guichen on December 11th, was, however, attacked next day by Kempenfelt, who captured several of the transports ; and a violent storm subsequently driving the fleet back to harbour, all that joined de Bussy at Santa Cruz were two store ships laden with ammunition and heavy artillery.

A third detachment consisting of three (or four) of the line, a frigate and a corvette,<sup>2</sup> under the command of M. de Peynier, left Brest, in company with de Guichen on his second sailing, with 35 transports carrying 2,500 men on February 11th. These got away without mishap. Finally, on April 19th a still further force sailed, consisting of three ships and two frigates, again under de Soulanges. But this was intercepted by Barrington, two of the escort were taken and the third and its convoy returned to Brest. Undiscouraged, the Minister informed de Bussy of his intention to send the same number of ships and troops in another attempt<sup>3</sup> : but this was not done.

Thus, of four attempts to send out reinforcements, two succeeded and two failed. Suffren should have received an addition of not less than ten ships, which, with the twelve already in the Indian seas, would have given him twenty-

<sup>1</sup> St. Michel and Illustre : also Consolante, Frégate, and Victor, Corvette (or César).

<sup>2</sup> Fendant, 74 ; Argonaute, 74 ; Hardi, 64 ; Cléopâtre, 36 ; and Chasseur. Apparently the Alexandre, 64, also sailed with the convoy.

<sup>3</sup> Suffren to Falck, February 26th, 1783. *Colombo Archives*. Similar information reached Hughes from the Cape on February 8th, 1783.

two to Hughes's twelve. The object of the fleet was to overwhelm the British and enable the French army, now increased by the 4,200 men who were sailing with de Bussy, to procure the decision on land.<sup>1</sup>

Although the place where the army was to land was left to be decided by the Commander-in-Chief according to circumstances, it was considered probable that the landing would have to be made on the Malabar Coast ; for it was not likely that the ships, sailing from France in December with their slow transports in company, could reach India before the end of September. It would then probably be too late to begin operations. A descent on the west coast would have had far-reaching results at sea. "When the English have lost Bombay they will have no port except on the east coast, while we shall have ports of all kinds. Thus, with ample bases, the French squadron will not be obliged to spend six months at the islands."<sup>2</sup> The importance of Ceylon, so insisted upon by Falck, was referred to. "If the English army captured the island, its recapture would probably be an object of greater importance than the making of any other conquests by which to begin the war in India." In fact, a secure footing, preferably in Ceylon, was the first thing which should be obtained.

While the French were sending these large naval reinforcements to India, they fully realised that Britain might do the same thing, though doubtless it was hoped that by despatching them secretly in small numbers their object and destination might be concealed long enough to strike the preliminary and "foudroyant" blow. Nevertheless, on the sound principle that it is impossible to be too strong at the decisive point, every effort was made to induce the Dutch to co-operate and to send the fine squadron of eight 50-gun

<sup>1</sup> The instructions will be found in Appendix V.

<sup>2</sup> Troude, *Batailles Navales*, p. 227. It is there said that these instructions were issued in 1782, but as de Bussy left France in 1781 they must have been issued then. He sailed from Cadiz on January 15th, 1782.

ships, then at the Texel, to join the French squadron in the East, and to add to that naval force a military force of two regiments. The hope was, indeed, rather a faint one, for the United Provinces, so called, were strangely disunited when questions of defence were involved, and—as had happened in earlier wars—agreement for common action between the several provinces was only reached, if reached at all, by tedious and tardy processes. Further, a strange idea had, for many years, found a permanent lodgment in the minds of Dutch statesmen. They apparently considered the proper use of a fleet in naval defence was to confine it to forming a portion of the local defences of a port, from whence it must not be moved: the theory of localised force. Thus the French found it no easy matter to persuade them to move their force from the Texel, while in the Far East the strong squadron of seven 64-gun ships under Schryver clung limpet-like to Batavia, when by crossing the Bay of Bengal and joining Suffren they could hardly have failed in crushing Hughes and obtaining what terms they liked in India and the East.<sup>1</sup>

The French Ministry were no less aware of the difficulty of overcoming this inertia than of the possibility that the British might strengthen their own squadron. What then should be done if the ships did not come from the Texel, or if the English were superior? In that case the instructions directed that “the French squadron should avoid battle until the troops are landed in some part of India. The squadron will then fight without fear that a reverse will interrupt the progress of the revolution which the French army will produce in India when it is landed.”

This paragraph forms a strange anti-climax to the logical processes which had informed the thought hitherto. Efforts were being made to obtain superiority at sea. And for what object? To enable the army to enter India and upset

<sup>1</sup> The threat upon Sumatra and Java, set in motion by the false instructions to Johnstone, may have contributed to this inaction. *Vide ante*, p. 133.

the balance between the British and those Country Powers at war with them. Yet suddenly at the end of all, it is said that the army can make the passage and land without protection. The old chimerical notion of crossing an uncommanded sea with a considerable army once more makes its distracting appearance. The squadron will lie at Mauritius, and the army, in some thirty or forty transports, will boldly sail to its enemy's coasts which are in occupation (if the word may be used) of a strong enemy squadron. The supposition that this would be done implies a belief in a readiness to take a risk which, if experience be any guide, is very rare. And the risk in this case would be real. To sail across the open sea of the Southern Indian Ocean involved certainly little or no danger. But to bring the army to a place where it could be landed, and where an effective stroke could be delivered, involved a very definite degree of risk. For, in spite of the vast length of coast, the number of places where such a landing could be made was very limited, and the seasonal character of the monsoon approximately halved the extent of coast available except during a brief period of the year.

The British Commanders were well aware of the times during which operations could be conducted on both coasts. We have seen how Hughes—and he was following a well-established custom—took up his station off Negapatam, the windward position for intercepting any force coming to the Coromandel coast. In the season when there was a possibility of danger on the opposite coast he went to Bombay, and could drop down very quickly to the southern ports or even lie off them in the north-east monsoon. Even if an enemy force should first establish itself in Ceylon—as it might undoubtedly do with no great degree of risk, protected by a small escort to secure it against attacks of frigates—it still had to get on to India before it could assist in the “revolution.” Once in Ceylon its presence there would be known to the British Commander and the strategical

answer was simple and obvious. In the westerly monsoon, the expedition could only collect at Batticaloa or Trincomali, and would have to pass the squadron off Negapatam. In the easterly it could assemble at Colombo or Jaffna, but these were both open ports into which a British squadron could sail and destroy the transports, or could take station off Tellicherry or Anjengo. The monsoons had their inconveniences, but they had a marked defensive value in restricting the choice of places of attack for over three-quarters of the year.

There was of course a chance that the superior British squadron for some reason or other might be tied to one coast or spot at the critical moment, a chance that actually occurred when Hughes was tied by his damages to Bombay for a period overlapping the end of the stormy season on the Coromandel coast. But gambling upon improbabilities, notwithstanding the fact that improbabilities occur in war, forms an insecure foundation for a campaign whose far-reaching aim is a decisive strategical victory which shall compel the enemy to sue for peace.

Thus the plan which had so rosy an appearance in Paris (for rosy it must have looked or such great efforts would not have been expended upon it) had an unsubstantial strategical foundation. It also proved, in practice, to be too optimistic. Its success depended on all the combinations being successful. There was no sufficient margin for the innumerable hazards, mistakes and accidents of war. The first shock to de Bussy's confidence came when, on arriving at the Cape on May 19th, he learnt by a despatch vessel that a British reinforcement of six of the line—Bickerton's—with five or six thousand troops was shortly to leave England for India. His prospective great naval superiority vanished; even a slight superiority would depend upon whether de Soulanges got safely out of the Bay. And if his hope of naval superiority were thus dissipated, so also was the value of his army reduced. He had hoped to land

over 4,000 men. Not only had he already lost a great number—reported to be over 800—on his passage to the Cape, but here was Bickerton with a number larger even than his original force.<sup>1</sup> What might Bickerton do? Lying as de Bussy was in Table Bay what could more forcibly enter his thoughts than that another attack upon the Cape would be made? More than ever was Mauritius now dependent on the Cape for its supplies, for the ships and troops must receive a respectable proportion of their food from thence. If Bickerton with 6,000 men attacked the Cape it must almost infallibly be lost. And, lest we should think that de Bussy was now “making pictures,” it is to be noted that this very operation had been strongly urged upon the British Government before de Bussy sailed as the most effective employment of the troops destined for India.<sup>2</sup>

The result produced by this intelligence was that de Bussy considered it essential to reinforce the Cape garrison with 600 troops. This number, he thought, would be sufficient to make its capture a serious operation.

The estimate of the time which the fleet and army would need for recuperation at Mauritius was terribly falsified. Scurvy in the ships and a form of plague on shore had broken out, which played havoc with his people. Over 700 men succumbed or were totally unfitted for service, and one of his ships—the *Alexandre*, 74—was so pestiferous as to be deemed useless for further service and was burnt. The sickness raged for months, and the General himself, an old and gouty man used to good living, was among the afflicted. Instead of being ready to sail, as had been hoped, in August, and so to arrive on whichever coast of India or in whatever other rendezvous he should select, in September, his crews and troops were not sufficiently recovered until

<sup>1</sup> The report was incorrect. Bickerton had 3,817 men. Wyly, *Life of Sir Eyre Coote*, p. 330. It is, however, needless to say that what affected de Bussy was not the actual number but the number reported. See also Appendix VI.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Appendix VI.



mid-November : and even then the General himself was still sick.<sup>1</sup> The four thousand troops destined for the conquest of India were now reduced by the detachment landed at the Cape, by interception and by sickness to a bare 2,500 or less.

Thus the long awaited army and its escort only sailed from Mauritius on December 24th, over four months after its calculated date. The rendezvous arranged with Suffren was, as we have seen, Acheen. Thither de Bussy then sailed, detaching one of the frigates ahead to get news. She rejoined him off Sumatra on March 2nd, bringing the intelligence that Suffren had left for the Coromandel coast six weeks earlier,<sup>2</sup> so course was at once altered for Trincomali, and eight days later the squadron with its thirty-two transports was sailing into harbour. But the squadron available to open the campaign was but a shadow of the force originally intended. To overcome Hughes's twelve ships there would have been, if all had gone well, no less than eighteen French and eight, or possibly fifteen, Dutch. But of the eighteen French, six<sup>3</sup> were lost ; and of the fifteen Dutch, the eight ships at the Texel sailed indeed, but went no further than the Cape and there remained to defend it, while the other seven, fine 64-gun ships under Admiral Schryver, lay in Batavia and did not raise an anchor to help those allies who were defending their possessions in Ceylon and on the coast of India. The futility of the doctrine of the use of local squadrons for defence could hardly receive stronger expression.

We must now return to Suffren, whom we left in the end of November impatiently considering how he should act.

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries, March 23rd, 1783. He there says the health of the troops was restored by November 10th, and that the Expedition could then have sailed ; and that de Bussy's health was the real cause and delay. Cunat (p. 260 n.) states that 429 seamen and soldiers died of the plague at Mauritius.

<sup>2</sup> Cunat, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> Orient and Bizarre wrecked : Protecteur, Pégase, Actionnaire intercepted by Barrington : Alexandre burnt.

He had just learned that de Bussy would not arrive for some months and that Hyder's defection was possible and even probable in consequence. Both for his military reason of cutting off the food supplies of Madras and furnishing himself with that same food, and the political reason of keeping Hyder in the field, and if possible in the Carnatic, until de Bussy should arrive, his own reappearance on the coast at the earliest moment possible was imperative. He must therefore remain at Acheen no longer than the procuring of spars and the completion of a certain minimum of repair required. He could finish his refits at Trincomali where he would get the assistance of artificers from the Dutch ; and to that end he desired the Governor of Colombo to send both carpenters and caulkers thither.<sup>1</sup> On December 20th, therefore, when some of his frigates had returned bringing him spars and rice from Malacca and Batavia, he left Acheen for the coast of Orissa with ten ships of the line, and detaching two other vessels—a 50 and a frigate—to cruise off the Ganges mouth to interrupt the rice supplies for Madras, he anchored off Ganjam on January 10th, with the idea of making a landing at Vizagapatam.

The rice transport was proceeding, for the Government of Bengal had been making every effort during the lull on the coast to revictual Madras. The French squadron therefore swept up many vessels and took over 1,000 tons of rice, a truly valuable addition to its own victualling. But fortunately for the English the greater part of the replenishing of food supplies of Madras had already been effected, and the majority of the captures were small craft returning empty to Ballasore Road. But Suffren had the good fortune to capture the *Coventry*, one of the four frigates left by Hughes for the defence of the trade. On a dark night, mistaking the French squadron for an East India

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Falck, December 15th, 1782. Falck replied on January 10th that he was sending caulkers from Galle and carpenters from Jaffna. *Colombo Archives.*

convoy, she sailed in among them and before her captain discovered his mistake she was so close to the enemy that, in the very light wind, escape was impossible.

The pleasure which these well-deserved if minor successes gave him was dimmed by news he received a few days later. Hyder Ali, on whose driving power and support he was founding his hopes of success in the forthcoming campaign, was dead. Hardly any loss could be more serious than that of this great soldier, inspired as he was by the two powerful motives of personal ambition and hatred of the English. What might have happened since his death on December 7th to his army, which had since been without its head, Suffren could not guess ; nor could anyone even tell him where that army was. His successor, his son Tippoo, was across the Ghauts, engaged in the defence of his possessions against an attack in Malabar, now at last brought into effect by the Bombay army under General Mathews, so that his co-operation would be difficult to obtain. One thing alone was clear. Suffren knew that Bickerton had arrived, bringing troops which had been disembarked at Madras during his flying visit. Cuddalore, and the small French army there, was consequently in very real danger. Neither the headless army in the Carnatic nor Tippoo's in Malabar—even if the son could be counted upon to continue the policy of his father, which was doubtful—could render assistance.

Giving up at once all thoughts of attack upon Vizagapatam or a regular campaign against the coastal traffic, Suffren therefore sailed at once for Cuddalore, where, after a wearisome passage of nearly three weeks in light and foul winds, he arrived on February 6th. Several vessels were taken on the route, but, as before, the greater part were empty, making their return journey to Bengal. That he was too late to strike the blow at Madras was due to no negligence on his part, for assuredly could no man have hastened his movements more than the French Commander. He had done his utmost, but Hastings at Calcutta had been too

prompt for him. If de Bussy had but observed the same impetuous avarice of time, and had sailed earlier from Mauritius, the revictualling might have proved without avail, for Madras might have been attacked on land by the combined forces of de Bussy and Hyder before the Nabob's death. But "they have waited to collect a little more provisions, without which we could have done very well, and to complete the refit of the *Hardi*; as though two months more of the weather suitable for operations was not more essential than the addition of one ship!"<sup>1</sup> There indeed speaks the true commander. Those few words, expressing the supreme value of time, indicate more eloquently than pages of writing could do, Suffren's military greatness and his superiority over Hughes.

Arrived at Cuddalore he found to his relief that it was still secure. Attack upon the town had neither been made nor appeared to be in the making. But there was no army other than the small garrison of Cuddalore to meet and co-operate with de Bussy, for the bulk of the French forces had accompanied Tippoo. To persuade Tippoo to bring his army back and join de Bussy was most urgent, and to this purpose he addressed the Nabob a letter urging his return to the Carnatic with as little delay as possible.

The difficulties of the combination required if full co-operation between allies is to be obtained, is a commonplace of warfare. Only too often the object which stands out most clearly in the mind of each is one which most directly and immediately furthers what he believes to be his own interests. This occasion furnished no exception to this unfortunate blindness. Here there were three parties concerned, the French, Tippoo and the Dutch in Ceylon, and each had its own interpretation of the situation. In the eyes of Suffren the principal object was to defeat the English in the Carnatic, and for that purpose he desired Tippoo to bring the whole of his army thither to unite them with the French forces.

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries.

Tippoo, on the other hand, seeing his own territory invaded, regarded the expulsion of the British from his Malabar territories as the first and most important object of the Allies ; and to Suffren's request to join him he replied with a counter request to the Admiral to bring his ships round to the Malabar coast. To the Governor of Colombo the principal object appeared to be the security of the Dutch possessions. He was as anxious as ever for the safety of Cochin and Ceylon, and he exerted all his capacity for persuasion to convince the Admiral that the most advantageous station the squadron could adopt was on the west coast, where it would keep Cochin open and guard Ceylon against invasion. He again pressed Suffren to bring either the whole or part of his squadron round to that side of India, and take station off Bonnacail at the end of March. As inducements he pointed out the rich prospects of the capture of Tellicherry and Anjengo, and the great disadvantage of awaiting Hughes to the eastward. If Suffren remained to the eastward, the enemy, so argued the Governor, would be able to take advantage of the security of the Madura coast to make some great effort in the west, which the French squadron, lying to the east and to leeward, could do nothing to prevent, while the English, lying in security off Ponnecail, would be in a position to do as they chose as they came down from Bombay, either coming round to the Coromandel coast or seizing a favourable opportunity for an attack upon Colombo.

These attempts by the Dutch Governor to move Suffren away from the neighbourhood of the French army were no more successful than those made by the Select Committee of Madras to impose its will upon Hughes. Suffren was by no means free from anxiety for the effects which an energetic effort by the Bombay army might produce, but to divide his squadron was out of the question, and to go round to the other coast with an inferior force, far from any base in which to shelter in case of a reverse, would be an invitation to disaster. Although these demands did not alter the

course of events, they deserve notice. They remind us that the conduct of war—which appears so simple when the perspective of time has enabled the wood to be distinguished from the trees, when the right thing to do appears so obvious—is fraught in its actual operations with very many distracting elements, pulling like several magnets to draw a commander away from the ideally best solution of a situation : and that he proves the greatest commander who is blessed with the power of distinguishing that which is vital from that which is expedient, and, with the courage which results from a clear mind and a high character, can withstand the pressure brought to bear upon him, often by powerful persons whom to offend may mean professional ruin.

Having communicated with Tippoo and put heart into the garrison by his presence, Suffren returned to Trincomali in order quickly to complete his still unfinished refit. There he found the *Vengeur*, which he had sent back from Acheen, still on the careen, and much work remaining to be done on the spars and hulks of several others of his ships. Leaving therefore two fast ships, the *St. Michel* and *Coventry*, to continue cruising off Madras, he entered Trincomali harbour on February 23rd ; and there, as we have seen, fifteen days later (March 10th) the long expected de Bussy at last arrived with the greatly desired reinforcement of four ships of the line <sup>1</sup> under M. de Peynier.

The first thing now to be done was to get the army into India. This admitted of no delay. Every moment was precious, for Hughes might appear at any time. Deciding to use only coppered ships for the operation, Suffren at once began to transfer the troops and the most essential artillery on board the fastest transports. In view of Hughes's superiority he felt that it would be hopeless to attempt to fight him even with his whole available force if the British squadron met him, and the purpose of the escort was merely to give defence against the frigate forces on the coast, or

<sup>1</sup> *Fendant*, 74 ; *Argonaute*, 74 ; *Hardi*, 66 ; and *Cléopâtre*, 36.

any detachment which Hughes might possibly have sent in advance of his main body—as we have seen Hughes had intended to do—and to assist with the disembarkation. His reason for not taking his whole force he expressed thus : “ If Hughes’s squadron, composed of seventeen ships both stronger and better commanded than mine, should meet me, I should be forced to fight : the horrible slowness (*lenteur horrible*) of my ships would make it impossible to take refuge in flight. On the other hand, by sailing with seven coppered ships the landing can be expedited before Hughes’s arrival, and if he should be met he could be avoided.”<sup>1</sup> His hope, however, was that he would succeed in getting back to Trincomali before the British squadron’s arrival. Thus, bold as Suffren was, he had no inclination to try conclusions at this moment with fourteen ships to seventeen—odds not very much greater than those with which Hughes had met him on April 12th when he had nine efficient and two “ hospital ” ships to twelve, or on September 3rd with twelve to fifteen. Again he lost no time. Three days after de Bussy’s arrival the squadron and transports left Trincomali for the coast. The army was put ashore with the utmost despatch on March 16th at Porto Novo, from whence the squadron went next day to Cuddalore, where not even all, but only the most urgently needed artillery and heavy stores were landed as fast as possible “ in order to hasten the departure, which daily becomes more urgent in consequence of the British squadron whose arrival cannot be long delayed.”<sup>2</sup> At daylight on the 23rd Suffren sailed again for Trincomali, leaving four ships off Madras with the object of intercepting an important convoy of eleven Indiamen, escorted by a 50-gun ship, of whose departure from England in the previous September he had received information.

The return voyage must have been a most trying one.

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Castries, undated but evidently March 23rd.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal de Bord*, p. 237.

Very light and foul winds reigned, and it can only have been with deep anxiety that Suffren daily watched the horizon as the squadron crawled and drifted for seventeen full days on their short journey. On the late afternoon of April 10th when he had come within twenty miles of his harbour, the Bellone, thrown well out in her scouting station, reported sighting from her masthead five sail to the southward. Shortly afterwards came another signal; fifteen were in sight; then another, there were twenty-three. Hughes had come at last. The only hope was that the little squadron should not be sighted.

Fortune this time favoured Suffren, for his squadron was not seen by the British scouts. Some straggling small craft alone were sighted by them and chased, but the pursuit took the chasers nowhere near enough to the French squadron to bring them into view. Darkness fell shortly after, and Suffren, crowding all possible sail and favoured by a sufficient sea breeze, made for the harbour, despatching the *Naiade* ahead to warn the batteries that Hughes with the whole fleet was upon him. The French squadron anchored next morning in safety at Trincomali.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly Suffren had luck on his side on this occasion; but it was luck that he had thoroughly earned. He owed his final safety to the energy with which he had conducted his operation throughout from the beginning. Had he dallied but a day at any time since the moment a month before when de Bussy sailed into Trincomali he would in all human probability have been lost; for fast coppered ships though he had, Hughes too had them and in greater numbers; and Hughes's were freshly out of dock and clean. The same insatiable avarice of time which had enabled him to win Trincomali had undoubtedly on this occasion saved his

<sup>1</sup> Mahan, (*Influence of Sea Power*), etc., p. 461, makes the mistaken remark that Suffren fell in with Hughes's fleet off the harbour mouth of Trincomali, but that "having only part of his force with him no fight ensued." Actually the reason for no fight taking place was that the squadrons were not in sight of each other.



squadron. In the one case it was a question of a couple of days ; in the other, one of hours only.

Hughes had thus by the merest matter of these few hours missed making contact with this detachment of the French squadron, so inferior to his own that its destruction must have been almost a certainty ; and this detachment formed so important a proportion of the whole French squadron that its destruction would have settled the whole question of the security of India. Was it impossible for him to have arrived earlier ? How had he spent the time between December 17th when he arrived at Bombay until April 10th, when he thus appeared off Trincomali ?

On his arrival at Bombay Hughes had put his repairs in hand at once ; very considerable they were, increased as they had been by the damages his ships had suffered aloft in the gale in October.<sup>1</sup> Gradually information began to filter in during January. He learned that Suffren had gone to Acheen. That was a relief, for the fears of the Madras Council would now be dissipated. On the other hand he heard that de Bussy with four ships and many transports had reached Mauritius and had been expected to sail in October for the coast, though with a very diminished force of not more than 3,000 men : and finally he had the cheering news that Barrington had taken a French convoy, bound for India, in home waters. Of Hyder he could hear nothing : the news of his death had not yet reached Bombay and he had last been heard of at Arcot. Stuart was still at Madras with the army and Colonel Lang, with over 6,700 men, was at Tellicherry, about to co-operate with Mathews in his diversion.

Thus the situation presented no disturbing features and his refit appeared to be proceeding so well that in mid-January he was able to express the hope that he would leave

<sup>1</sup> He needed eight completely new lower masts and yards, and twenty-four were only capable of repair by extensive shipwrights' work. Besides these there was a quantity of the lesser spars to be made anew or fished and remade : and his hulls needed work repairs from shot as well as from straining and want of caulking after two years' hard work.

Bombay with fifteen of his ships on February 20th. The remainder would follow him so soon as they were ready. Expecting, however, that de Bussy with his transports might now be coming he sent orders (dated January 21st) to the two frigates, *Active* and *Medea*, to cruise between Ceylon and the Basses to intercept them and to remain cruising there until he joined them with his squadron.

His hopeful prediction was unfulfilled. The reconditioning of the squadron proceeded very slowly, for the workmen in the yard were dilatory and supplies of food were not forthcoming. Although by an Act of Parliament of 1782 the duty of providing and supplying all the victualling for the squadron had been imposed on the Company, the President and Council of Bombay, pleading inability, would give no help. Ready as they were to demand refreshments and other help from the squadron for their garrison at Tellicherry and to refuse to repay the Crown for supplies furnished to themselves, not a cask of salt meat would they furnish to the squadron without ready money paid down for it; and at that moment ready money was not at Hughes's disposal. The business of watering was no less badly performed. There was an insufficiency of tank-boats and these were manned by slovenly and idle crews, for whose services excessive charges were made. The Crown, as it so often has been, was looked on as a convenient means of profit, its periods of difficulty the periods of opportunity for those who can skin the taxpayer. And in the meanwhile the squadron was delayed, fret though Hughes did with anxiety for what might be happening in all the parts of India. The Mahrattas were still an uncertain factor: the Nizam looked very like joining the French: and Madras was insecure when the enemy held Trincomali and the army from Mauritius was available to aid Hyder or the Nizam. The one great essential was a squadron able to play its part. "Nothing is so necessary or can so effectually answer that end (the protection of India) as a decided superiority at sea. I am now with every officer in the squadron

exerting myself to the utmost to get fifteen ships of the line in a condition for sea, and shall then without a moment's delay proceed to the Coromandel coast to seek the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of all these exertions, because of ineffective administration and public greed, the squadron's repairs and provisioning were far from complete in the later part of February when he had expected to sail for the Coromandel coast; and by then a new and perplexing situation had arisen. There was uncertainty as to whether the squadron would be most needed on the east or the west coast. Though news had been received of the appearance of the French squadron on the coast of Orissa, there had not so far been a sign of the appearance of the French army from Mauritius, whose departure, according to the intelligence of a month earlier, had been intended in October or November. Where was it now and when and where would it appear? A letter from the Cape stated that the Mauritius Council proposed to attack Bombay with 4,000 men, and we have seen that that movement had been strongly urged by the French authorities. With that threat hanging over him, would Hughes be wise unduly to hasten away from the west coast and expose Bombay to attack at the very season when operations were practicable? Any landing of a strong French force might fan the Mahrattas once more into flame; and it was not inconceivable that the French squadron taking up its position on the Coromandel coast had among other objects that of drawing the British away from the west and so lay open and undefended the entire west coast from Anjengo to Bombay. In the absence of the squadron Bombay would be lost, nor would there be time, if the British squadron should have gone round to the Coromandel coast, for it to play any part in its recovery before the monsoon changed and the harbourless Malabar coast became a lee shore. And Hughes could not divide the squadron. His object, put in its broadest terms, was clear enough—the

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Townshend, January 15th, 1783.

defence of India. Which should be his immediate objective—a French army which might land at Bombay or the French squadron off the Coromandel and Orissa coasts? Thus, the military threat introduced a new factor, and important as it was to set out and meet the enemy squadron, there were reasons of no small weight to mitigate the evils of not having been able to do so. Though all his squadron was not repaired, there was an ample force to deal with de Bussy if he came, escorted with no more than the Mauritius reinforcement, and so long as he was there, there was no danger to Bombay.

Another piece of information which eased his mind for the safety of the Carnatic was that of the death of Hyder: while further to indicate that Madras was in no great danger came the news that Stuart, with the reconstructed army strengthened by 1,200 men from Negapatam—which on Stuart's advice had been abandoned—was preparing to take the field and attack Cuddalore: the same report which, when it reached Suffren, led to those two rapid movements he made to Cuddalore in February and March. Colonel Lang also wrote with confidence of his power to hold his own in Tanjore.

Thus Hughes finished his refit, the ships repaired at Goa joined him, and on March 20th he sailed for the Coromandel coast. It was now late enough in the season for him to feel confident that no attack by de Bussy would be made in the Malabar. He did not yet know that the French Commander-in-Chief had arrived a bare ten days before at Trincomali. Off the Friar's Hood he was joined by the *Active*, Captain Troubridge, who reported having seen nothing of the enemy, and the squadron passed on to the northward. On the 10th his cruisers captured a prize from which he received the information (and it was incorrect) that the whole of Suffren's squadron was at Trincomali except two of his fastest ships of the line and two frigates which were stationed off Madras to block up the port and capture its supplies.

He therefore pushed on towards Madras that night, sending Andrew Mitchell—Jervis's "bullet-headed Centurion"—to search for them with a properly superior force of four clean ships of the line:<sup>1</sup> and the Sceptre next day played tit for tat in capturing the Naiade and thus balancing the loss of the Coventry. But the St. Michel and her consorts were not sighted, nor did they in turn capture that convoy of eleven sail escorted by the Bristol, 50, for which they were particularly sent out. The convoy fell in with Mitchell's detachment, which brought it in safety into Madras Road.

By what narrow margins ships and squadrons had missed each other since Hughes had rounded Galle! Troubridge, keeping to the southward, off the Friar's Hood, had not seen Suffren leaving for Cuddalore. The prizes taken by Hughes on April 10th gave no hint or sign that Suffren at that moment was at sea within a few miles. The Bristol and her eleven Indiamen were missed by the St. Michel and her consorts, and by but little; and the St. Michel herself was in her turn missed by Mitchell's greatly superior force of double its strength. At every turn the issue had been determined by lack of information. It is the old tale of scouts, and more scouts, and yet more scouts; numbers, not size; power of obtaining accurate information and of giving it, in time, to the Commander. For lack of scouting, the information which might have been the means of settling in one stroke the campaign in India was lacking, and Hughes proceeded on his way to Madras without an inkling of how near his grasp his enemy had been. There he anchored on April 13th. In the four weeks at sea much of his water had been consumed—for he had left Bombay without being able fully to complete—and he at once proceeded to refill and reprovision in readiness for the coming campaign. Once more it was a tedious process. Insufficient watering craft and a heavy surf delayed the work and it was not until May 2nd that he was ready to sail to open the campaign at sea.

<sup>1</sup> Burford, Sultan, Africa, Eagle: and Active.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BATTLE OF JUNE 20TH, 1783

THE Madras army which had been reorganised during the wet season, was now under the command of General James Stuart ; for before it began its spring operations the great-hearted Coote was dead. Worn out with the arduous campaigning of the previous year, Coote had gone to Calcutta to recover his health without the intention of returning to the Carnatic, but Lord Macartney, by his manners and his methods, had created so serious a situation at Madras that Coote's presence was, in Hastings's opinion, essential to avert disaster. Though still far from recovered he had therefore embarked at the end of March in a Company ship and sailed from the Hooghly for Madras. Reaching the latitude of Madras on April 14th, the *Resolution* fell in with the ships which Suffren had stationed off Madras, and a day's chase followed in which her good sailing alone enabled her to escape. There was an element of good fortune in this anxious situation, for the chase drew the enemy away from Madras at the critical moment when the valuable East India convoy, escorted only by the Bristol frigate, for which the French ships were on the particular look-out, was arriving. Thus, unmolested, the convoy reached the road in absence of the blockaders.<sup>1</sup>

When the *Resolution* reached Madras on April 24th, Coote was a dying man. The strain of the anxiety during the prolonged chase was too great for his frame, enfeebled as it was by the rigours of the climate and his many campaigns,

<sup>1</sup> For a vivid description of the *Resolution's* escape and Coote's anxiety cf. Hickey's *Memoirs*, vol. iii.

and far from fully recovered by the few months spent at Calcutta. He was carried to his house in a litter; three days later this great soldier died.<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving Calcutta, Coote had prepared a Memorandum,<sup>2</sup> in which he set out his disapproval of the manner in which the war was being conducted, with particular reference to the neglect of the army and the failure to concentrate upon the principal object on land. "As the best chance we yet have of rising superior to our enemies I must recommend the preservation and support of the Army . . . and that you use your utmost endeavours to keep it ready for immediate service." This, he pointed out, had not been done. Our primary concern was the expulsion of our European enemies, the French in particular, from the coast, which called for all our efforts. The French were strong in Cuddalore and were likely to be reinforced—a prediction very shortly after fulfilled by the arrival of de Bussy's army. The relative strength of armies in this country was determined by the number of European troops, and until we fought the French it was obvious, he remarked, that our European force should be kept as united as possible. "When it may be in our power to possess a decided superiority in European troops and to carry them into action, it is a mistaken policy as well as a dangerous maxim to hold that there can be no occasion for so many and that they will be sufficient": or, in other words, that it was impossible to be too strong at the decisive point. Contrary to these broad general principles, he pointed out, the Council of Madras had decided to disunite the European force. Though danger clearly threatened from Cuddalore and Trincomali, detachments from Madras had been sent to Malabar, to Masulipatam and one even to Bengal. The army was thereby not only risked

<sup>1</sup> For the abominable manner in which Coote was treated by Macartney, cf. Wyllie, *Life of Eyre Coote*, chap. xix; also Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, vol. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Dated February 1783.

at sea when the squadron was forced by the season and its own needs to go to Bombay, but troops were weakened by the sea voyage. Thus they had been unable to take immediate advantage of the death of Hyder Ali. That was the moment to strike a blow when the loss of the directing head had left the enemy in chaos. Instead, nothing had been done as no concentrated force was available. The Chiefs in Mysore had been given time to consult together and re-establish confidence. Tippoo had had time to return to the Carnatic coast. Thus the Government of Fort St. George, by disuniting the army, had risked the very existence of the British in India.

Proceeding, Coote commented on the functions of the Southern Army, which he defined as to preserve the Southern country, protect Negapatam and prevent any European Power from getting a footing there, and co-operate with the main army towards the expulsion first of the French, then of the Mysoreans, from the Carnatic. When that had been done it would be time enough to think of invading Mysore from the Carnatic coast. He deplored the abandonment and destruction of Negapatam, which was done by Macartney's orders. By so doing we put it out of our power to support or give relief to our troops south of the Coleroon. Further, we had deprived the British squadron of a convenient base to windward and had given the French an opportunity to establish themselves there, where their supplies were more easily obtainable from Trincomali than from Cuddalore: a base from whence they could operate most effectually in the south-west monsoon for intercepting ships from Bengal, which could be covered by the squadron so long as we held Negapatam. How clearly Coote saw the need for concentration of effort and the interplay of the sea and land, is as plain in this one of the last of his written appreciations as it had been in his letters and his actions throughout the perilous times in 1781 and 1782.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wyly, *Life of Eyre Coote*, chap. xix; also Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, vol. iii.



The scheme for the forthcoming campaign was already made when Hughes reached Madras on April 13th. A great effort was to be made against Cuddalore and the French army there. "Our next campaign," Stuart wrote to Hughes, "will I trust put an end to French consequence in India." The preparations had been in hand for three months. Transport had been reorganised and, by cutting down baggage rigorously, even to the extent of taking no tents for the European troops, the army could now take with it twenty-five days' supplies in place of ten.<sup>1</sup> Intending that his blow should be decisive, Stuart wished to concentrate all the available troops, and with this object desired that Colonel Lang, commanding the Southern Army at Trichinopoly, should move up and join him against Cuddalore. But here Macartney, with his evil and jealous genius for intervening in military plans, stepped in. At a consultation of the Select Committee to whom Stuart put his proposal, Macartney expressed the view that the Southern Army could not be spared. He did not want it for the proper purposes of a body of fixation to prevent interference against the enemy elsewhere, or for the defence of points which could not be abandoned. He desired to conduct a secondary offensive attacking enemy positions in Coimbatore and encouraging the disaffected—a "guerre de chicane"—and to create a diversion for Mathews's diversion: a thorough confusion of ideas. Stuart, however, succeeded in persuading the Committee against the Governor that as the one great object was the capture of Cuddalore the whole army should be employed in effecting it. To this the Committee agreed with the qualification that he should leave "enough force to protect our friends in the Southern Country." Macartney manœuvred to his utmost to upset this decision, and the orders were so worded that the minimum possible force should be detached to join Stuart.

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue, *History of British Army*, vol. iii; Memoir of Captain Ross, *Melville Papers*,

Colonel Fullarton now succeeded Lang in the command of the Southern Army. In spite of Stuart's expressed desires to "lay all inferior objects aside" and join him, Macartney sent orders deliberately ordering Fullarton to conduct operations in the south. Stuart was undoubtedly a difficult and intractable person, but assuredly the provocation he received by this constant and almost vindictive interference with the conduct of his operations furnished solid grounds for indignation and remonstrance.

The march on Cuddalore was to start from Madras on April 20th. On the 19th, Stuart explained the situation to Hughes in a letter in which he gave the Admiral all the news and represented how entirely the success of the operation would depend upon the sea, for the twenty-five days' provisions would not suffice for the campaign. The bulk of the supplies of the army must be carried by sea, and in order that the troops should be able to operate promptly and without pause, the ships carrying the food should be south of Cuddalore ready to land their cargoes by the time the army arrived. Provided there should be rapid and uninterrupted communication by sea the prospects were bright; for the French army could expect no help from Tippoo, who was on the other side of the Ghauts, drawn thither by Mathews's diversion against Mangalore. Stuart anticipated that the army would reach Cuddalore on May 3rd or 4th: the distance was computed as eleven marches for which, though it might even be covered in eleven days, it was proper to allow a margin. But everything depended on the ships keeping pace with the army and the food reaching the troops in time.

The march began well. Chingleput was reached on the 22nd, two days ahead of time, but now the absence of the tents played a part. The men began to fall sick, and no less than 160 of the white troops had to be sent back. Thenceforward the march proceeded at the almost incredibly slow rate of three miles a day. The provisions carried with the

army were exhausted long before Cuddalore was in sight, and those sent by sea could only reach the army slowly, for the left of the line of march was as much as eight to twelve miles inland, and all the stores had first to be landed through the surf and then carried up to the camp.

The frigates accompanying the storeships were under the command of Captain Troubridge.<sup>1</sup> The ships moved at the rate of the army, and the speed of the army depended on the rate at which stores could be landed and carried inland to its successive camps; though for what reason it could not march direct on Cuddalore without provisioning on its way is not clear. Landing the stores was a slow process. There was now a strong monsoon blowing which, although it was a weather shore, brought a heavy surf on the beach in which only the mahsulah boats could work, and of these there were too few to begin with and of the few many were quickly knocked to pieces on the beach. Troubridge laboured hard to overcome the many difficulties, for the unceasing attention to which labour Stuart warmly thanked him, while fretting his heart out. "I think every minute an hour that detains us from our operation." As the vessels lightened, the work grew slower, for not only had they to be refilled with sand for ballast, but many more boats became damaged, until in the end Troubridge had to go to Tranquebar to procure more food and more boats. Though the storeships arrived off Cuddalore before the army nothing could be landed, for the enemy's horse was active along the shore and held all the landing places.

The consequence of these delays was that a march which

<sup>1</sup> Troubridge, whom we here see as a post-captain, had what must have been a remarkable service in the East Indies. He left England in the *Seahorse* in November 1773, aged apparently 15. Rated midshipman in March 1774, he served as master's mate and lieutenant in the *chaser*, *Seahorse*, and *Superb*, of which ship he was First Lieutenant in October 1782. Promoted to command the *Lizard* sloop, he was next given post rank as command of the *Active* on January 1st, 1783, and eventually came home as flag captain to *Hughes* in 1785, anchoring at Spithead in May, nearly twelve years after he had left it as a midshipman.

it had been calculated could be covered in eleven days, or should at the most have occupied no more than fifteen, took no less than forty-seven days : thus it was not until June 7th that the army reached its camping ground to begin the siege of Cuddalore.

Though the failure of the siege was mainly due to the tardy arrival of the army, there were other causes. To Macartney's refusal to allow the Southern Army to take part there is to be added the perverse and penurious conduct of the Select Committee, who, by refusing to hire coolies for the unloading and transport of the rice from the ships to the camp, threw this work upon the troops, and deprived the army of men who instead of taking their places in the ranks were shouldering bags of food on the beach and bringing it up from the shore to the several stopping-places of the army. The combined result of the misplaced military activities of Macartney and the policy of the Committee was that there were insufficient troops to complete the investment of the town by land.

Cuddalore was, however, capable of being completely isolated by sea, though the stable door was only shut after Suffren had slipped in his two shiploads of supplies in the third week of March. Hughes, regarding its capture as the first thing, proposed at first to remain off the port with the whole squadron, where he would be certain of meeting the enemy if he came to its succour, and would fight him from a distance from his port. But unfortunately a false report had been received by the Select Committee of Madras of the arrival of de Soulanges at the Cape with ten ships—four French and six Dutch—and these, with supplies for the squadron, might now be on their way to Trincomali. It was mainly to intercept this reinforcement that Hughes chose the Trincomali station rather than the point of arrival of the enemy off Cuddalore. On May 2nd, therefore, without delaying to complete with water he sailed from Madras “to seek the enemy's squadron and if possible intercept their

expected reinforcement." He left a frigate squadron<sup>1</sup> at Madras to co-operate with the army, protect its line of supply and assist in landing the stores and all the other services required. On his way south he hugged the coast closely, for he learned from a Portuguese vessel that Suffren was hastening the completion of his last ships with the object of proceeding to render assistance to Cuddalore. He came off the port on May 25th, thus taking no less than three weeks to cover the short distance. In Back Bay he sighted the French squadron at anchor, but although there were but ten of them in the Bay, the remainder being still within Trincomali harbour, Hughes considered that, drawn up as they were and covered by strong batteries of guns and mortars on shore, an attack was not advisable. He therefore passed on to the southward with the object of intercepting the expected French reinforcements. But he saw nothing of them, for they were non-existent.

Suffren, since his safe arrival at Trincomali, had had an anxious time. He had narrowly escaped on April 10th, but the detachment he had left off Madras under de Peynier was then exposed to capture by the British squadron. Moreover, Hughes would certainly be bringing troops with him. What would he do? Would he not go to Negapatam and join his troops to those of the Southern Army, so that de Bussy would be attacked from the north and from Tanjore and blockaded by this squadron—precisely, in fact, that situation which Stuart desired to create but Macartney had prevented? "In this appalling situation," he wrote on April 11th, "I must put to sea without waiting for Peynier in spite of my inferiority. I shall disarm the frigates, embark the crews of the transports and try the luck of battle." This he was the more willing to do as, by the time he would be ready to sail, which was not for another twenty days, he could hope to have the advantage of the wind owing to the change of the monsoon. In the mean-

<sup>1</sup> *Isis, San Carlos, Naiade, Chaser, Pondicherry, Minerva, Harriott.*

time, on April 11th he sent the *Naiade* to warn Peynier of his danger and to get information of the situation on the coast.

On the 21st he was relieved by the return of Peynier's detachment, but now there was no news of the *Naiade*. Four days earlier he had received a letter from de Bussy,<sup>1</sup> desiring him to send without delay the munitions which Suffren, in his hurry to get away, had not landed at Cuddalore, and telling him that the English Army was still at Madras, but only awaited the arrival of the squadron to attack Cuddalore. What he wanted was "food, wood, bullets—but above all food," wrote de Bussy. The Fendant now brought corroborative news, but though Suffren did all that lay in his power to hasten the refitting of his ships he could not hope to leave before May 12th or 15th.<sup>2</sup> He badly needed accurate news as to Hughes's strength. "They tell me," he wrote, "that he has seventeen. That superiority is not enough to keep me shut in here, if you have need of me."

On May 4th, still in want of news, he sent out the *Coventry*. She went to Cuddalore and there learned the fate of the *Naiade*, captured by the *Sceptre* after a resistance so gallant that, according to de Bussy, Hughes on meeting her officers told them that he would willingly lose all his own frigates at that price.<sup>3</sup>

To add to the bad news of the loss of the *Naiade* there were others. Hughes, it now appeared, had eighteen ships, all King's ships; Coote had arrived at Madras bringing with him twenty-four lacs of treasure, the loss of which would have been a serious embarrassment to the British; the *Bristol* and her convoy had arrived in safety, with 600 troops; finally, the want of food and munitions at Cuddalore was now acute. So serious now did the situation appear to de Bussy, that he categorically ordered Suffren to come

<sup>1</sup> Dated April 10th.

<sup>2</sup> Suffren to de Bussy, April 28th. *Pondicherry Archives*.

<sup>3</sup> De Bussy to Suffren, May 2nd, 1783. *Pondicherry Records*.

to Cuddalore at once, bringing these badly needed supplies.

De Bussy's order reached Suffren on May 12th and was followed a few days later by another, in which the Commander-in-Chief said that it would be quite impossible for him to reinforce the squadron from the garrison—Suffren had asked for 1,500 men to strengthen his crews—for his forces were not sufficient to hold his own on land. Fully realising the inferiority of the squadron, he must, however, insist upon its coming to his help; for it was the army that was now in the greatest danger. "In consequence, Sir, you will sail as early as possible with your fifteen ships: three things oblige me to give this order, the want of food, the lack of munitions and the disastrous ('pernicieux') effect that your absence cannot fail to have upon the spirits of our enemies, our allies and all the Asiatic peoples."

When he got this letter on May 12th, Suffren was still not ready for sea, nor could all his ships be completed, at the earliest, for a fortnight. He proposed therefore to sail on the 26th and he was making his final preparations when Hughes, with his greatly superior squadron, appeared off the port on the morning of the 24th and after looking into the anchorage at Back Bay, stood to the southward.

What did this mean? asked Suffren. Was it to meet some British reinforcements, or to intercept those from the Cape he himself was expecting? or was he watching for the moment when Suffren should have set out to help Cuddalore, to attack Trincomali, its garrison weakened by 500 men embarked in the French squadron to enable it to sail? He could not tell. What he could tell was that de Bussy was in immediate want of food and munitions and his object must therefore be to furnish him with what he needed. But he chose his own way of doing it. He did not obey de Bussy. "Here then," he wrote, "is the decision I took. Believing that with fifteen ships, only eight of which are

coppered, I could not attack seventeen, all coppered and stronger than mine, and who have the wind of me which I cannot gain from them owing to their superior speed ; and certain that they had left on May 15th with some frigates only blockading Cuddalore, I sent the *Fendant*, *Cléopâtre* and *Coventry* to escort two transports laden with provisions and artillery. This I considered the best way to help Cuddalore without exposing Trincomali, which assures our existence in the southern seas, to the risk of loss. I considered that in not obeying M. de Bussy's orders, given under different conditions, I should be carrying out his intentions."<sup>1</sup>

Suffren's decision was no sooner taken than acted upon. The departure of the English squadron to the southward left the way open. Munitions and food were hurriedly embarked on board fast sailing storeships which sailed on the evening of the 28th escorted by the *Fendant* and *Coventry*, unseen by the frigate which Hughes had left cruising off Trincomali. The small squadron made its way in safety, arrived off Cuddalore on June 1st, landed its supplies, and without a moment's delay started on its return voyage to Trincomali.

When the news reached Stuart that supplies had been thrown into the town he remarked grimly that this might enable it to hold out longer than he had allowed. Was then Hughes right in abandoning his first intention to block up Cuddalore in favour of going in search of the French squadron to the southward ? He had agreed with Stuart that the principal object of the combined forces at that moment was the destruction of the French Army in Cuddalore. Nothing could so materially contribute to that result as a strict isolation by sea, and a strict isolation was most certainly to be achieved by beating the enemy. But to beat the enemy he must make sure of meeting him. Was this more surely to be accomplished by keeping the squadron close off the port or by attempting to intercept the French

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries, May 28th, 1783. To Bussy, May 27th.



reinforcements which were believed to be on their way to Trincomali? In the present writer's opinion certainty in such a case is to be preferred to possibility. There was a reasonable certainty that he could stop any supplies entering Cuddalore if he remained off the port; there was a possibility only that he might meet and intercept the reinforcements expected from the southward. Admittedly, if that reinforcement joined Suffren it might give him a superiority at sea, but the chances both of meeting and intercepting it were but small, for all experience had shown the uncertainty of the time of arrival of ships from Mauritius or elsewhere. Whether, however, it joined Suffren or not, the neighbourhood of Cuddalore, well removed from the enemy's base, was both a more certain place in which to find it, and a more favourable spot in which to fight it, than the offing of its own port into which, if worsted, it could retire in safety.

It may be that Hughes considered that the importance of preventing the enemy from coming with a superior force outweighed all other considerations; and it may also be said with certainty that he did not calculate on Suffren's bold stroke in sending supplies escorted by one ship of the line, and was confident, as he undoubtedly had reason to be, that the frigate squadron which he had left on the coast would be off Cuddalore in time and be fully adequate, in force, to deal with any attempt to revictual the garrison; and that it was these considerations which induced him to leave Trincomali behind him and make a search of the southward. How unfortunate the decision proved is now clear. In the first place, as we have seen, Suffren had decided to make an attempt with fifteen ships, and if Hughes had not appeared off the port Suffren would have sailed; it would then have been under conditions very different from those of three weeks later when the British were reduced by sickness and their water expended that he would have met his enemy off Cuddalore. In the second place, owing

to his absence, the ships taking the greatly needed supplies were able to slip out of the harbour and to throw the food and munitions into the fortress.

Hughes, proceeding to the southward as far as Batticaloa, having sighted nothing then turned northward again, and in order not to leave Trincomali open he resumed his station off the harbour on June 1st. Looking into Back Bay he saw that the whole French squadron had moved out from the inner harbour and was now in readiness for sea, but, as before, they were so well anchored and so strongly covered by the shore batteries, that, in accordance with the custom of the time, he did not attempt to attack it at anchor. But during the subsequent night he received news of the sailing of the *Fendant* and her charges. Two British seamen, prisoners in the port, escaping in a canoe, reached the squadron and were able to inform the Admiral of the sailing of the storeships. Having no doubt that their object was to supply Cuddalore, Hughes at once made all sail in pursuit and two days later he sighted and chased the *Fendant* and *Coventry*, then on their way back to Trincomali, having accomplished their mission. But darkness fell before he could get near them and they eventually regained Trincomali in safety on June 10th, while the English squadron made its way towards Cuddalore, and, keeping the sea, cruised to the southward of the port, in a position to cover it, until June 9th, when Hughes put into the road and communicated with Stuart.

The squadron had now been over five weeks at sea and its water was running short; for it will be recollected that in order not to delay his sailing he had not completed with water before he left Madras. If he was to remain at sea much longer water must be obtained, and Madras and Negapatam were the only plentiful sources of supply, though small quantities might be obtained from the Danes at Tranquebar.

The prospect of the squadron departing to either place

came as a great shock to Stuart. To him it meant, as it had on the earlier occasion meant to Coote, the ruin of the expedition. The rice and other stores brought by Troubridge's convoy were still being landed, but they would by no means suffice to keep the army for long and the transports must return to Madras for more as soon as possible ; further, nothing could keep the army in the field except a constant service of shipping between Cuddalore and Madras. Writing to Hughes in reply to the Admiral's letter informing him of the squadron's need of water Stuart remarked, " The first great stroke on which the whole politics of India and the stability of the British Empire here turns (whatever may be the Treaties with Country powers) is the extirpation of the force and influence of the French in India." The capture of Cuddalore was the first and principal object, and to effect the capture he would require to be covered by the fleet for full seven weeks from that day (June 9th). " If the fleet goes to Madras and Monsieur Suffrein anchors off Cuddalore with the means he will give to Mr. de Bussy in every respect, I fairly say to you, Sir Edward, I cannot succeed, speaking practically as a military man."<sup>1</sup> If therefore the fleet must water, could it do so at Porto Novo ? In which case he would provide forces on shore to protect the watering-places.

Hughes dropped down to Porto Novo to see what opportunity there was of watering there. He found both banks of the river in the hands of large forces of native troops, and several days must elapse before these could be driven away. Looking, therefore, round for another source, he despatched Troubridge to Tranquebar to endeavour to bring up water from thence in casks and thus to eke out his supplies a little longer, but Troubridge returned on the 11th with news that no water was obtainable, for the wells there were dry. In the interim, information had reached the Admiral that Suffren was only awaiting the return of

<sup>1</sup> Stuart to Hughes. Camp by Cuddalore, June 9th, 1787.

the Fendant to come with all his squadron to the coast, so that his topsails might appear at any moment over the horizon; and in that situation Hughes did not consider he could risk having his men ashore watering, even if Stuart were able to send a force to capture and hold the river banks in time. Lastly, scurvy had set in. Already on the 8th he had 1,121 sick in the squadron of whom he had already had to send 605 back to Madras and the number was increasing daily. Thus at the critical moment when everything depended upon the squadron's presence, sickness was beginning to take its heavy toll, and there was but a fortnight's water in his ships, most of which were already pumping it out of their ground tiers. All therefore that he could promise was that he would remain off Cuddalore as long as possible.<sup>1</sup>

While Hughes was thus anxiously engaged, his antagonist was, as he had heard, preparing to come to the coast to assist the beleaguered French Army. On June 7th one of the storeships which had taken part in the recent relief returned to harbour and acquainted Suffren with the situation. She brought a letter from de Bussy countermanding his previous orders and strictly enjoining the Admiral not to risk the squadron by bringing it to the coast. This change in his views was made after receiving Suffren's letter telling him of the appearance of the English squadron off Trincomali. It had flashed upon his mind that the expedition on land against Cuddalore was nothing but a feint, a trap to catch and destroy the French squadron. Aware of his own need of help from the sea he deduced that the English would realise the situation equally vividly. They were aware, he knew, that the French were hoping for a reinforcement. What course then was more obvious than to force Suffren to battle before he was joined by his reinforcement, and what more certain means of doing so could there be than threatening Cuddalore and the small isolated French

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Stuart, June 11th, 1783.

Army there, which would require the help of the squadron either to prevent its starvation or to remove it by sea in case of extreme danger? The result of putting to sea, said de Bussy in his letter, would be fatal. "A battle, with three ships less than the enemy, even admitting equal losses and injury aloft, would reduce us for the rest of the campaign to our land forces only, and consequently restrict us to very few operations." Moreover, he now hoped that Tippoo, fresh from a success he had achieved at Nagar, would come to his help soon.

It was these considerations that induced him to cancel the order he had sent to Suffren to leave Trincomali. A fortnight later he sent another order repeating very formally his order not to move. The preservation of the squadron, he said, is of the highest importance. Although the army was in constant danger of being attacked by the English, who were then only twelve miles from Cuddalore, de Bussy most strictly again enjoined Suffren to remain at Trincomali, and to confine his action to any demonstrations he could make with the object of containing the British squadron and thus keep Cuddalore open by sea. He was not to leave Trincomali "except in the event of the trenches [at Cuddalore] having been forced and the Army obliged to shut itself into the walled town." These orders he confirmed a week later in a yet further despatch which reached Suffren by the *Fendant* on her return on June 7th.<sup>1</sup>

In Suffren's eyes this exception gave him no guidance whatever. His comment upon it was that it was obvious that he could not be informed of the situation, or know whether the trenches were held or lost, while if, in spite of all the difficulties of communication, the news should reach him, it would only arrive too late for him to act. In the same way as he had not hesitated to exercise his own judgment and to disobey the positive orders of the Commander-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 30th. *Pondicherry Records*, Also Suffren to Castries, July 4th. *Archives de la Marine*, B. 4, 268, pp. 59-62.

in-Chief on the previous occasion, so he did now. He, and only he, could judge what the risks were. The situation was not one on which the Commander-in-Chief of the Army was capable of forming an opinion. Calling his captains together he explained the situation to them, telling them the orders he had received and of his intention to sail and attack the English squadron. The fire of the commander communicated itself to his subordinates, who unanimously agreed. "Toutes les raisons démontraient une nécessité absolue d'aller attaquer l'escadre anglaise."<sup>1</sup> Munitions and food were at once hurried on board, and on the 11th—the same day that Hughes was telling Stuart that the enemy might appear at any moment—the French squadron sailed from Trincomali.

It was a fine and courageous act, not merely because he was starting with fifteen ships of the line to attack the eighteen British. Of those fifteen one was leaking very badly, another so badly that she had continually to keep her pumps going; eight were uncoppered while according to French information all of the British were coppered; many had been off the ground for three or four years, whereas the British had certainly docked some of theirs recently in Bombay; and the complements were not more than three-quarters complete—in which of course they resembled those of the British, but this the French Admiral could not tell. Moreover, Suffren had had his four tussles with the British when the superiority lay on his side and had been unable even then to take a ship from them. Now he determined to fight them with the conditions reversed. This decision is indeed a healthy and fine corrective to those who interpret strength in the mere material elements of numbers and guns, and vainly imagine that the prime function of a battleship is to be secure from injury.

Thus Hughes's expectation, expressed on the 11th in his reply to Stuart, that the French would soon make an

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de Bord*, p. 254. Also Suffren's letters.

appearance was soon fulfilled. On the morning of June 13th his scouting frigate, the *Medea*, Captain Erasmus Gower, reported sails to the southward which were later made out to be fifteen of the line and three frigates. So after all, Suffren had not been reinforced, and Hughes found himself for the first time facing the French with a squadron of ships superior in numbers, though short of men. How should he now put this superiority to the most effective use ?

Hughes's conduct from the beginning had been dictated primarily by two things: the security of the army's supplies and a desire to engage the enemy to windward. This latter was not due to mere pedantic adhesion to a dogma, nor to fear of the results of an engagement in the lee gage. It was due to a conviction that a decisive action such as he regarded as essential to settle the whole situation in India was possible only if he had the wind and could force the action and follow up the enemy. His shortage of water made it particularly important that the action should be decisive, that there should be no mere temporary repulse of the enemy, leaving him free, so soon as Hughes should go to Madras—as go inevitably he must within a few days—to return to Cuddalore and break Stuart's communications.

When the French squadron made its appearance on June 13th, the fleet of thirty odd transports was still unloading its supplies of food for the army. It lay about nine miles to the northward of the squadron. Hughes had now three courses of action from which to choose: either to sail direct upon the enemy, now some twenty-three miles to the southward, against a northerly current and a very light and inconstant wind, blowing at that time from the S.S.E.<sup>a</sup>; or to close upon his transports, and make sure that they were closely covered until their unloading was completed, so that in the event of the possible mischances of war, failure of the wind, darkness or other causes, they would be secure from attack: or to remain where he was. How

he saw the question he does not say in so many words, but his interpretation can be deduced from various sentences in his letters, written on those days, and from his acts.

It is not difficult to see that if he should weigh at once, the wind being S.S.E., the only course he could steer was due east. With the strong northerly current then setting, the course he would make good would be well to the northward of this ; and therefore if he thus acted, he would open the way direct to Cuddalore for the French who would come up with a fair wind from astern aided by the current. His transports, unprotected and of vital importance to the army until they were discharged, would then be destroyed before ever he could get back to the shore and give them protection, and the expedition to Cuddalore would be destroyed.<sup>1</sup> Whether Suffren intended fighting, or aimed only, as an earlier commander—Bouvet de Lozier—had aimed in 1749, at throwing in provisions or stores, or attacking the store-ships, Hughes had no means of telling. He remarked at a later date that he thought that Suffren's chief desire was to get into Cuddalore, and this he may reasonably have expected on the 13th. If the French Commander desired to do that and no more, Hughes, by proceeding to sea at that moment in those conditions of wind, would merely be playing the enemy's game without having any expectation of bringing about the decisive action which he regarded as indispensable for the security of India.

To close his transports would ensure their protection, preventing as it would the enemy both from attacking them and from landing any supplies to the garrison.

To remain where he was to the southward, and to act according to the circumstances, would also carry out the same purpose, but with a lesser degree of certainty. For the

<sup>1</sup> The dead reckonings show that Hughes was set about fifty miles to the northward in seventy hours between the 16th and 20th. Suffren in April had taken two days to go from Cuddalore to Tranquebar in consequence of "*des courants plus forts que jamais.*"



transports were a long way off, and in the flaws and chances of the unstable breezes, of which the Admiral had so much bitter experience in four battles and several sea passages, and the possibilities afforded by darkness, a situation might well arise which would prevent him from coming to the aid of the army's shipping in time to save it from destruction. Time, that potent factor, here played its usual part. The choice he made was to close the transports, and he therefore weighed and re-anchored some six miles or so nearer to them. That he had the defence of the still unloading transports in his mind in making his choice is to be deduced from a letter to Stuart on the next day but one when he wrote, "This appears to me at present the best post I can take for the protection of the army and the several ships and craft that attend it." It may truly be remarked that a better protection would be given by proceeding to sea and destroying the fleet that threatened it. But in order to do that he must, as the previous remarks have indicated, have merely opened the way for the French squadron to sail in and sink the shipping. That done, the army would be marooned until more stores could reach it from Madras, while the British squadron would have no certainty of the corresponding off-set of the destruction of the French.

The French squadron came no nearer during the 13th. An hour after Hughes had re-anchored, Suffren also came to an anchor. The French Admiral took this step (says the *Journal de Bord*) to retain the weather gage, as it was too late to engage in battle.

Next day the French squadron closed somewhat at first, formed in their battle formation No. 3, with Suffren, acting in accordance with new orders from the King,<sup>1</sup> embarked on board the frigate *Cléopâtre*. The wind was between W.S.W. and south-west, but blew feebly, and though Hughes might have had the advantage if it should hold, the French did not advance far and he could not have got

<sup>1</sup> See post, p. 366.

contact against the current. Suffren, to whom as we have seen the weather gage was essential, remained to the southward, and had indeed himself some difficulty in even regaining his anchorage, swept northward as he was by the current.

Thus Hughes remained, watching events, waiting for a favourable opportunity. But his dwindling water was sorely troubling him, and though Stuart had offered to send troops to drive the enemy from the river at Porto Novo he felt that he must not open his distance from the transports and expose them to the risk of attack. He wrote to Stuart that the enemy "seems to be retreating to the southward again this afternoon and came down this morning *très cautelement* (sic). I shall turn the tables on him when I can prudently."<sup>1</sup> He urged the general to hasten the landing of his stores in the fine weather so that the squadron could have independence of action; and though he was so distressed for want of food and water, he hoped that he would be able to eke out the provisions and delay a little his return to Madras. "They expect reinforcements," he wrote, "so do we, yet I think with you this is the finishing stroke of the French." A finishing stroke it must be made. Half-measures were useless.

On that same day Stuart was able to tell him that he had attacked the enemy the day before, had driven de Bussy into the walled town, and also that the detachment he had sent to enable the fleet to get water at Porto Novo had made its beginning by the capture of Chillumbrum, though the watering places were still covered by the enemy troops. Thus the situation on shore was definitely promising. What was needed was accurate judgment of the precise moment at which to move, when the French could not escape being brought to action under favourable conditions for a crushing blow.

On the 15th the French still remained to the southward of Porto Novo; but Hughes felt that he could not take advant-

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Stuart, 4 p.m., June 14th.

age of the occupation of Chillumbrum to water his fleet, considering that the best position he could take to ensure the security of the transports, which were still being unloaded, was that in which he was anchored, and that he could not risk separating the squadron from them. Even if he should go off Porto Novo, a few ships only could water at a time, and this would be insufficient to enable the remainder to stay on the coast. He had, however, hopes that four frigates which he had sent to Madras to bring water from thence would return in time with a sufficiency. Suffren's apparent hesitations made him write, "I believe M. Suffren did not expect to find me here. He is seemingly at a loss what to do. I conclude he wishes to get into Cuddalore." There was indeed nothing to put him in possession of what was passing in the enemy's mind, and to tell him that Suffren was waiting on the wind to attack with his inferior force, hoping for a good sea breeze which would give him the weather gage and the manœuvring speed he desired.

At daylight on the next day—the 16th—Suffren was seen to be under way standing to the northward on a light westerly wind. He had decided to attack in his order No. 3, and by noon he had closed to within nine miles of the British squadron. As he did so the wind worked round from west through south-west and south to south-east—a circumstance which illustrates Hughes's need for caution, holding as he did the leeward position and having the defence of the army as an important charge. At noon, as the French bore down on what appeared to be a line abreast, Hughes prepared to weigh, and at three he weighed and formed line on a E.N.E. course close-hauled, the wind having by then gone into the south-east. He ordered the transports simultaneously to weigh and take cover to the northward of the squadron. The wind, however, disappointed Suffren. It died down and the squadrons were not in contact till about half-past four, when they passed each other, nearly within shot, on opposite tacks, but the day being nearly spent Suffren kept his wind,

and did not make an attack. "J'y renonce," he wrote, of his intention to attack, "parce qu'elle ne pouvait commencer qu'à 6½ heures."

Hughes kept to seaward throughout the night, aiming at getting to the eastward to gain the weather berth in the sea breeze which both he and Suffren expected to come with its accustomed regularity in the afternoon. Daylight on the 17th found the French squadron between the British and Cuddalore. Suffren now quickly got into communication with de Bussy,<sup>1</sup> from whom he learned of the army's unfavourable situation, created by the battle fought on the 13th, in which, though the French numbers were superior, and they had inflicted heavier losses on the British than they had suffered, they had lost about eight guns, had had to abandon their trenches, and were now shut in inside the walled town, "a bad place in which we are physically bound to surrender sooner or later." If therefore Suffren could, after a successful action, come in and remove the sick and wounded, de Bussy would try to co-operate with Tippoo to save Cuddalore. But this, he wrote, might not prove possible, in which case the only resource left would be to embark the army and carry it to Trincomali.

This news was bad enough, but two other letters, written on the 17th, put the French situation in an even worse light. The sortie which de Bussy had contemplated had proved impossible, as he found he could not count upon Tippoo's co-operation,<sup>2</sup> and, in response to Suffren's request for 1,500 men the utmost reinforcement he could afford the squadron was 1,200 men, of whom half only could be Europeans. "That is all that lies in my power unless I embark myself with all my army, and, in consequence, abandon India." This letter Suffren received in the afternoon. It decided him as to his action. For the last four days he had waited for the wind and manœuvred with the object of getting the

<sup>1</sup> De Bussy to Suffren, June 16th, 1783. *Pondicherry Records*.

<sup>2</sup> De Bussy to Suffren, June 17th, 1783. *Pondicherry Records*.

weather gage for his contemplated attack. He now knew that he could get a handsome reinforcement which would practically complete his crews, and Cuddalore was, for the moment, open. Quickly therefore he despatched a letter to the General, saying that if the enemy's position should still permit his doing so that evening he would run into Cuddalore in the hope that de Bussy could put the men on board. The very unusual failure of the sea breeze, noted by all the observers both French and English, was his security, for it made it most improbable that Hughes would be able to get in-shore in time to interfere with him.<sup>1</sup> In the evening, therefore, he ran into the anchorage and de Bussy promptly sent off the 1,200 men who were embarked during the night. General de Bussy has been the object of much unfavourable criticism, but here he deserves full and unqualified praise. Many men in the situation in which he then was, threatened and pushed by a force approximately equal to his own, would have declined to weaken their forces. Fowke, for example, in 1756, in a far less critical situation, had refused to give Byng a reinforcement for fear that Gibraltar would be exposed to danger, failing to see that so long as the squadron was superior no harm would come to the fortress under his charge. The French Commander-in-Chief of the land and sea forces in the Indian seas showed a better discernment of what was the keystone of the situation. Only a victory at sea could save his army.

Thus the morning of June 18th found the tactical positions of the squadrons apparently reversed. Suffren was now in Cuddalore Road, Hughes had worked to the eastward of him to a position almost in the direction from which Suffren had approached him. But whereas Suffren had then had a fair wind and the weather berth, the wind, more fickle

<sup>1</sup> "At a quarter to six, the enemy being still to seaward<sup>†</sup> and leeward, frustrated evidently by their hope of having a sea-breeze, the wind being continuously to the westward—a rare thing in the southerly monsoon—the Admiral considered he would safely anchor at Cuddalore."—*Journal de Bord*, p. 266.

in its favours than it had ever been hitherto, was this day blowing from the W.N.W. Hughes approached, so far as he was able, beating against the light and adverse off-shore wind. Suffren in reply weighed and the day was spent by both squadrons in drifting, in calms or with puffs from all directions of the compass, the ships barely keeping their positions off Cuddalore. From daylight until four in the afternoon only two knots altogether are logged by some of the ships of the British squadron. Manœuvring, in fact, there was not. Suffren, who had slightly though but little more wind close in-shore, could do no more to close Hughes down wind than Hughes could beat up to Suffren. No engagement was possible on that day however great the will or skill of the commander of either squadron.

June 19th passed in the same sad way. Though a breeze faintly flattered the hopes of the French Admiral in the afternoon, it was too feeble and unreliable to permit him to confide the fortunes of the French army to its mercy. "From three o'clock there were so many puffs from the sea, so many from the shore : half the ships of the squadron had one breeze, half had another. It would have been dangerous for us to attack in such weather, for it was necessary with our inferior forces to come into action in good order and with a wind on which we could depend." <sup>1</sup>

On the morning of the 20th the squadrons were still in presence of each other though about twenty miles apart, the British to the S.S.E., the wind still varying between south-west and west, and very feeble in the forenoon. The extraordinary phenomenon of the total failure of the sea breeze again took place. All Hughes's efforts to gain the weather gage had thus proved fruitless, and now, as his water was embarrassingly low and his men were falling down sick in increasing numbers daily, he decided that he must

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de Bord*, p. 270.

abandon hopes of engaging to windward. His own description of the three days' manœuvring between the afternoon of the 16th and the 20th fully explains his object during that time. "From this time to the 20th I was continually engaged in endeavouring to get the wind of the enemy which, however, I was never able to effect from the extraordinary variableness of the winds that often brought part of the squadrons within a random shot of each other." Hughes's movements were based upon the sea breeze coming in as it usually did, but, as all the observers remarked, there was during those days a complete cessation of the sea breeze, "*une continuation de vent d'Ouest fort extraordinaire dans cette mousson où les brises fraîches se déclarent tous les jours au sud-est dans l'après-midi.*"

In these conditions, Hughes formed line at noon on a bearing north-east and south-west one point free, the breezes still blowing off shore from the north-west by northward. If the sea breeze should after all come in its accustomed manner from the south-east he would have had the position he desired. But it did not. Suffren, on his part, bore down with the wind, but so light was the breeze that it took him four hours from noon to cover the short ten to twelve miles which separated the squadrons. "At 2 o'clock the enemy showing a disposition to engage I brought to, maintopsail to the mast to receive them."

The tactical plan by which Suffren had proposed to engage the numerically superior squadron of Hughes had as its basis a very heavy concentration on the rear and a fixation of the van and centre by an extremely light containing force. In this plan, which he had issued to his commanders before leaving Trincomali, the order of battle (called "No. 3") provided for massing his five most powerful ships<sup>1</sup> in the rear. These ships were to engage the five rear British ships while the *St. Michel*, 60, *Hannibal*, 50, and *Consolante*, 40, all coppered ships, and therefore fast, were to double

<sup>1</sup> *Fendant*, *Argonaute*, *Héros*, *Illustre*, *Annibal*—all 74-gun ships.

and attack to leeward.<sup>1</sup> Thus, eight ships, five of them 74's, would concentrate upon five of the enemy, a combination, it will be observed, of power and speed. The seven remaining ships, six of 64 and one of 50 guns, were to act

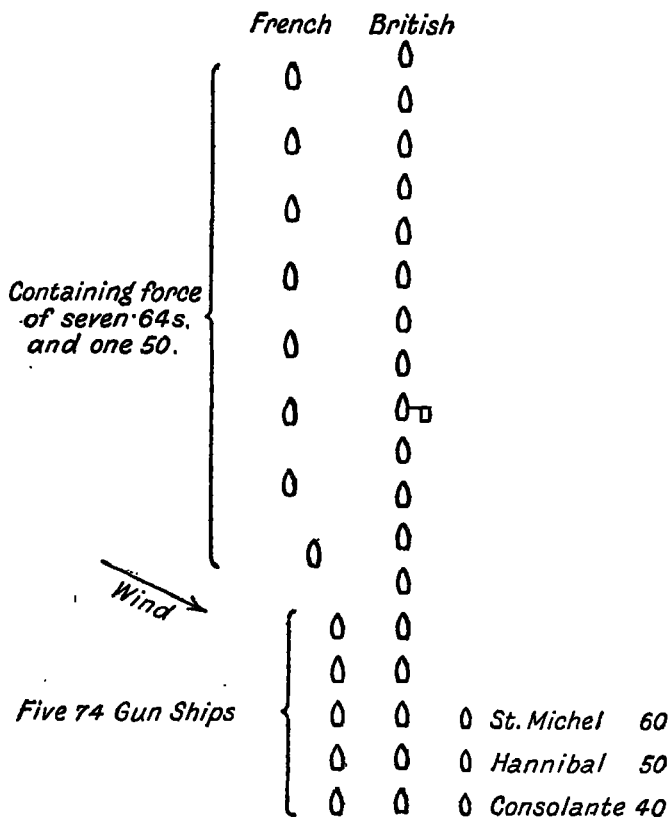


DIAGRAM OF SUFFREN'S PROPOSED ATTACK IN JUNE, 1783.

as a containing force, spreading themselves along the English line to windward and engaging, but at a long range, the thirteen ships ahead of the rear among which it was probable that Hughes would have placed his heavy ships. Attack

<sup>1</sup> There is a discrepancy between the accounts given in Trublet (p. 203) and Cunat (p. 279), the former giving the Fendant, 74, as one of the ships doubling to leeward in place of the Hannibal, 50, as given by Cunat.



in this form could only be conducted if the weather berth were held. Its success would depend very greatly upon surprise, upon whether the intention could be concealed long enough to get the ships into the desired positions, and finally upon whether the ships engaged closely enough to crush the rear before the van could come to its help. Like Nelson, he looked to a "victory before the van of the enemy could succour the rear." Time, in fact, was a factor of supreme importance. In the light winds of the summer, provided the ships could effect these movements in the approach, there was good reason to expect that the help from the van would not arrive in time to save the rear. But the closest action would be absolutely necessary.

One other new tactical feature in this action was the position taken up by the French Commander-in-Chief. After the battle of Dominica de Grasse had represented that a naval Commander-in-Chief was too much in the thick of a battle to direct the movements of a fleet. In consequence, the French King had issued the following memorandum :

"M. le Comte de Grasse, having long recognised that it was impossible for the Commander-in-Chief of a fleet properly to estimate (*'bien juger'*) the movements of his own line and of those of the enemy during a battle, as much in consequence of the cannon smoke in which he is shrouded as by the attention which he is obliged to pay to the movements of the ship on board of which his flag flies : having recognised also that the ships in the van and rear are only able to distinguish with difficulty the signals addressed to them from the centre of the line, and that the time for their execution has often passed before they are seen : but knowing that hitherto Generals-at-sea through sentiments of honour (*'délicatesse'*) have not thought it right to quit their ships during action although they have experienced the inconveniences arising from being on board a ship fighting in the middle of a line ; I send you this letter to inform you that it is My intention that in the future the commanders of My

squadrons when they shall command more than nine ships and are delivering an attack in line, are to proceed on board a frigate from whence it will be more easy for them to observe the enemy's movements and direct the movements considered most proper for the squadron under their command, and to hasten their execution. I have considered it necessary to make My wish known plainly to you in order that custom ('*préjugé*') and your own delicacy may not in any way stand in the way of that which I have decided to be to the advantage of the good of My service. . . .

LOUIS."

VERSAILLES, *May 6th*, 1782.

Suffren was temperamentally opposed to the rigid conception which informed this order. To him, as we have seen, orders were never laws of the Medes and Persians, blindly to be observed whatever the situation. His comment on it is characteristic of the man.

"I shall conform to it so far as I consider it of value to the good of the service. The spirit of this order would be but poorly complied with if in putting it into execution the Commander-in-Chief should not give that example which a Commander must show on those occasions in which he is able to command from his own ship quite as well as from elsewhere."

On June 14th and 15th when there appeared to be a possibility of action, Suffren signalled the order of battle No. 3, thus implying that if action had taken place on those days he would have carried out his attack in the manner described earlier. On June 20th, however, he changed his mind and adopted Order No. 1, an order which contains no special features. There was neither a concentration of power in any part of the line, nor, with the coppered ships distributed as they were about the line, any fast division such as he had on earlier occasions employed. For reasons of which, unfortunately for those interested

in tactics, the French Commander has left no record, he abandoned the tactical manœuvre contemplated in favour of the single line. Since the conditions, the position, the wind and weather all appear to have been the same on the 14th, 15th and 20th, and the only observable difference appears to be that he had now a fully manned squadron which carried no unimportant a proportion of the garrison of Cuddalore, he may have felt that the less brilliant and ambitious form of attack in line was better suited to his squadron. That there was hazard in the bold conception of containing thirteen ships, commanded by such experienced seamen as he knew his antagonists to be, there can be no denial. Speculation obviously cannot answer the question finally. All we can say is that, at that moment and in those conditions, he preferred a "soldier's battle" in line to a tactician's battle of concentration, of economy of force, and that, as he saved Cuddalore, which was the object for which he had come to sea, he was justified by the results. Nevertheless those who love an artistic handling of a situation cannot but have a lively regret that he did not put his bolder tactical scheme into operation.

Hughes, as we have seen, brought to at two o'clock to receive the enemy's attack. Suffren, on board the *Cléopâtre*, sent his squadron into battle, the only tactical modifications being an order to the *Consolante*, the 40-gun ship at the tail of the line, not to engage the British heavy ships except at long range, and to his fire-ship to be ready to fasten herself to an enemy whenever she received the order to do so. For the rest his orders were for a well-formed line and battle at pistol shot.

At 4.55 Suffren, who was then abreast the van in the *Cléopâtre*, ordered the leading ships to attack. The French squadron came into battle in good order, stretched along the length of the British, but with the rear somewhat outside its distance. The battle presents no features of tactical interest. It was hammer-and-tongs between the opposing

ships of which the distribution of fire is approximately indicated in the diagram.<sup>1</sup> Stimulated by Suffren, who in his frigate cruised along the line and encouraged his ships to close, the French attack was conducted with courage and

	Guns			Guns	
<i>K 8 W 23 Sphinx</i>	64	○	—	<i>Defence</i>	74 <i>K 7 W 37</i>
" 7 " 8 <i>Brillant</i>	64	○	—	<i>Isis</i>	50 " 3 " 30
" 11 " 55 <i>Fendant</i>	74	○	—	<i>Gibraltar</i>	80 " 6 " 40
" 17 " 42 <i>Flamand</i>	50	○	—	<i>Inflexible</i>	64 " 3 " 30
" 4 " 25 <i>Ajax</i>	64	○	—	<i>Exeter</i>	64 " 4 " 9
" 2 " 16 <i>Hannibal</i>	50	○	—	<i>Worcester</i>	64 " 8 " 32
" 10 " 25 <i>Argonaute</i>	74	○	—	<i>Africa</i>	64 " 5 " 29
" 15 " 45 <i>Héros</i>	74	○	—	<i>Sultan</i>	74 " 4 " 20
" 4 " 20 <i>Illustre</i>	74	○	—	<i>Superb</i>	74 " 12 " 41
" 5 " 25 <i>St. Michel</i>	60	○	—	<i>Monarca</i>	70 " 6 " 14
" 10 " 21 <i>Vengeur</i>	64	○	—	<i>Burford</i>	70 " 12 " 20
" 2 " 21 <i>Sévère</i>	64	○	—	<i>Sceptre</i>	64 " 17 " 47
" 5 " 14 <i>Annibal</i>	74	○	—	<i>Magnanime</i>	64 " 5 " 16
" 0 " 4 <i>Hardi</i>	64	○	—	<i>Eagle</i>	64 " 4 " 8
" 2 " 20 <i>Artesien</i>	64	○	—	<i>Hero</i>	74 " 5 " 20
" 0 " 2 <i>Consolante</i>	40	○	—	<i>Bristol</i>	50 " 0 " 10
				<i>Monmouth</i>	64 " 2 " 19
				<i>Cumberland</i>	74 " 3 " 11
<i>K 102 W 376 Totals</i>	<i>1018 Guns</i>		<i>Wind</i>	<i>Guns 1202 K 103 W 429</i>	

## BATTLE OF OUDDALORE, JUNE 20TH, 1783.

Diagrammatic sketch showing distribution of fire and losses in individual ships. 4.30—6 p.m.

determination except in the rear, which did not come to close quarters; and although some of their individual ships were engaged at times by two British ships, the total losses of the French squadron were less than those of their

<sup>1</sup> The *Hardi* took station as second astern of the *Héros* at some time, and in a collision between *Vengeur* and *Annibal* the former lost her mizen topgallant mast (*Journal de Bord*).

enemies.<sup>1</sup> In the account given of one officer who was present—Trublet de la Villejegu—the writer remarks that the British continually bore up during the action, but of this the writer finds no confirmation elsewhere, and such British masters' journals as record the courses show the ships going by the wind. The question is, however, of sentimental interest only. The practical outcome was that, boldly attacking a materially superior force, the French in two hours of hard close fighting inflicted losses on the British greater than they suffered themselves. Darkness brought the engagement to an end, and whether the British bore up, as some French writers say, or the French hauled their wind, as the British logs say, and the British did not haul theirs, comes to much the same thing in the end. The men in both fleets were tired out. They had been at their quarters and at the braces continually for four days. Physical exhaustion, particularly in the scurvy-stricken British, was upon all of them. Darkness was welcome in each squadron.

Putting on one side all questions of national conceit it is natural to ask why a squadron of so marked a superior material strength as the British should, in a direct series of duels in line, have suffered greater losses than its opponent. The answer lies in the manning of the squadrons.<sup>2</sup> Guns are of little use if there are not men enough to serve them. When Hughes left Bombay on March 20th he was over 2,000 men short out of his total complement of 9,525, and he had sent 605 men to hospital with scurvy early in June. He was then left with over 500 sick on board, and another 1,700 were incapacitated during the next fortnight. "From 9th to the 22nd the disease increased so as most of the ships of the line had from 70 to 90 men, and in the ships last from

<sup>1</sup> British losses : 105 killed ; 429 wounded.

French losses : 102 killed ; 376 wounded.

<sup>2</sup> French, 1,018 guns ; British, 1,202 guns : or a proportion of broadside fire of about five to six.

England double that number, in the last stage of the disease and unable to come to quarters, dying daily.”<sup>1</sup> From these figures it is clear that the squadron went into action with not more than 5,000, or if it be thought that half of the 2,200 sick could get to quarters, 6,000 men.

The number on board Suffren's squadron can only be guessed. His complements on the scale of the French establishment of 1779 would have been between 9,680 and 11,660—probably about 10,000.<sup>2</sup> When Suffren left Trincomali he had asked de Bussy to reinforce him with 1,500 men, from which it may be inferred that he was short of that number, possibly more, for, according to the *Journal de Bord* he was only able to bring up his crews to three-quarters of their complement by embarking every available seaman and soldier. He was reinforced by de Bussy with 1,200 men from the Cuddalore garrison, and thus, if his ships were three-quarters manned before this reinforcement (i.e. 7,500 men), the crews were thereby brought up to 8,700 men, of whom about 1,000 were sepoys. It is not unreasonable to suppose that he had less than that number, but that he was as much as a further 2,700 men short seems improbable; and it does not appear to be an improper conclusion that the number of effective men, able to come to quarters in the French squadron, was considerably larger than that in the British; and this probability is increased when it is recollected that, as there were two more ships in the British line, a larger deduction in men employed at the braces has to be made. Thus the battle was not merely

<sup>1</sup> Hughes's despatch, July 25th, 1783. Hickey, *Memoirs of William Hickey*, vol. iii, p. 132, remarks that in the end of May Hughes sent to Calcutta to procure men “of which most of his ships were sadly in want, some being one hundred and fifty short of complement.” None arrived before the battle. The number 1,700 is given by Col. Wilks (*Sketches of the South of India*, etc., vol. ii, p. 439), who was a contemporary and well-informed writer. He had also lost 127 men by the blowing up of an ammunition ship on April 18th.

<sup>2</sup> This establishment allowed ten to twelve men per gun. Castex, *La Manœuvre de la Praya*, p. 158. French complements were always higher than British.

what it has appeared to some writers to be—a contest between eighteen ships and fifteen. It was a struggle between some 5,000 men—possibly 6,000 if some sick men could come to quarters—manning eighteen ships, and certainly not less than 8,000 or 8,500 men, manning fifteen ; which is a very different matter : and some of the British ships were practically crippled.<sup>1</sup>

For a little over an hour after dark both fleets continued plying to the northward, out of shot. That course, combined with the current, took Hughes' from Cuddalore and the army. He therefore wore—the wind being now at west—and stood back to his anchorage off Cuddalore, off which, though at some miles' distance to seaward, he arrived next morning. Suffren, continuing his course in the opposite direction, was carried by the current to the northward of Pondicherry ; and neither Admiral knew whither the other was gone. Hughes had now to decide what he should do. It was possible for him to resume his station off Cuddalore, but was it now necessary for him to remain, and if he did so, how long could he hold the position ? His water was exhausted, his men were dying fast of scurvy, and though he might have been able to get some water at Porto Novo—he says it could not have been done, and this appears to have been the opinion of King and Bickerton—he could not save the lives of his men without fresh food. The army's supplies had been landed, and though more would have to be sent from Madras the store-ships could be escorted by the squadron when it was ready. The enemy was gone, but whither he did not know except

<sup>1</sup> On June 8th the following were the sick lists in some of the ships :

Gibraltar . . .	169	out of a complement of	695
Cumberland . . .	106	„ „	600
Magnanime . . .	87	„ „	500
Defence . . .	122	„ „	600
Inflexible . . .	103	„ „	500

These numbers (*vide supra*) had increased largely by June 20th, and none of the ships carried their full complement.

that he was last seen going north. He might return. But should Hughes remain off Cuddalore with his men dropping down and his ships waterless on the chance of his return? While the need for remaining no longer appeared acute, the need for going to Madras was acute in the extreme, as he had predicted a fortnight earlier.

He spent the whole of the next day in the offing of Cuddalore repairing his damages. No sign of the enemy appeared. Next morning therefore he bore up and stood away to the north-west, sailing in loose order with the intention of returning to Madras.

When dawn broke on June 22nd, the squadron being then to the northward of Pondicherry, the enemy squadron was sighted on the quarter, bearing south-west at anchor in Pondicherry Road; the wind being south-west they were dead to windward. Should he now turn about and engage the enemy again? In his despatch he says, "I made all possible sail to come up to them." He hauled his wind for the land, forming his squadron, which was still sailing in loose order, in line of battle, and at 9.30 in the evening he anchored to the southward of Alemparve, a place some twenty miles northward of Pondicherry. The first thing next morning he sent for the commanders in the second and third posts—Bickerton and Richard King—"in order to collect their opinions relative to the future operations of the squadron which is much enfeebled from the scurvy having made a very rapid progress and from the number of wounded and lost in action and a prevailing scarcity of water in the ships." After mature consideration it was decided "to proceed immediately to Madras as no other water could be procured to the southward and that at Madras the squadron would be sooner stored, watered and refitted and the people recovered." With that decision he weighed two hours later and proceeded to Madras, where he arrived on June 25th.

Lack of water and the scurvy were thus the predominating reasons which caused the return of the squadron to Madras.



could not have been given him. His enemy's effective strength was reduced very greatly by the terrible attack of scurvy, and its movements, in the end, determined by the exhaustion of its water. Hygiene and supply are fundamental elements affecting both strategy and tactics.

For all his success, the situation of the French at Cuddalore was none too rosy. A sortie made by the garrison on the 25th met with no success and cost the loss of one of their principal officers, M. de Damas, and of the help hoped for from Tippoo there was no sign. The English had occupied Porto Novo and supplied themselves with a large quantity of cattle, de Bussy was showing no signs of vigour—"consultations, irresolution, and weariness" were what Suffren found on shore. Finally the rumour that de Soulanges had reached the Cape was now known to be false. On the other hand, though there was disappointment in the British camp at the withdrawal of their squadron, and the army there was suffering from fatigue, while its prospects of success were dimmed by the departure of the squadron, there was no despondency in Stuart's mind provided Fullarton made every effort to join him; in which case, he told him, "you may yet be in at the death." Macartney, certainly, had done his best to ruin the expedition, for he had deliberately gone behind the back of the Commander-in-Chief and countermanded Stuart's repeated orders to Fullarton to come with the utmost speed to Cuddalore, while another subordinate, Mr. Sullivan, the Company's agent in Tanjore, was keeping up a shrill cry to keep the troops in the south away from the decisive point. Fullarton nevertheless had elected to obey the General and was marching with all haste for Cuddalore.

It was with the army in this critical situation and with Fullarton's reinforcement within three days' march of Cuddalore that the news was received that the preliminaries of peace between France and England had been signed in Europe on January 20th. This news had reached Madras on June 17th and a ship had been sent to carry the news to

Hughes ; but as she did not find him the news only met him on his arrival. He at once despatched the *Medea* back to Madras to inform the French Commanders of the peace. There she arrived on June 29th and hostilities with the French ceased forthwith.

The squadron had now no further operations of importance to perform. Hughes remained on the Coromandel coast, exchanging prisoners and arranging matters connected with the peace, until October, when he sailed for Bombay, detaching some ships and vessels to assist the garrison of Mangalore which was besieged by Tippoo's army—a work unfortunately of supererogation, for the Madras and Bombay Presidencies, as though anxious as to which should excel the other in folly, recalled the troops which were on their way to assist the hard-pressed garrison and abandoned it to its fate. To land the relieving force of sepoys he had taken his squadron into Tellicherry and there he suffered the loss of the first and only one of his ships of the line. A violent south-west gale sprang up while he lay at anchor, the *Superb* dragged and fouled the *Sultan* and struck, and Hughes's flagship—"my good old ship"—became a total loss, although through a providential change of wind off shore, all her people were saved.

The reduction of the squadron in the East Indies began so soon as the ships could be refitted and stored for the homeward voyage. An Admiralty letter of March 10th, 1783, directed that the British squadron should at once be reduced to two ships of 74 guns, two of 64, one of 50, and two 32-gun frigates. In consequence, nine ships under Commodore King sailed for England in the autumn, three in need of a thorough overhaul before the voyage were sent to Bombay to refit, and these, when refitted, followed the Commodore's detachment home ; and five remained to constitute the squadron. The French commander had instructions to retain in the East a force equal to the British : and he, when he had completed the various negotiations concerning Trincomali, the embarkation

of de Bussy's army and other matters, sailed for Mauritius in October, leaving four of the line, a 50-gun ship and two frigates under the command of M. de Peynier, to conduct affairs on the coast of India.

During the subsequent years the squadron was reduced, as it had been on previous occasions, to a frigate force only apparently by agreement with France,<sup>1</sup> though larger ships were restored to the station when Cornwallis was appointed to the command in 1789. This, however, was only temporary. In 1791, under severe pressure from the House of Commons for a reduction in expenditure, the Peace Establishment was cut down, the improved relations with France rendering this, in the opinion of the House, possible. Accordingly on May 7th, 1791, an Admiralty secret order directed Cornwallis to return home without awaiting relief, bringing back the whole squadron, or a part of it, if the situation warranted their return, after consultation with the Governor-General. The naval defence of British interests in India then devolved, as it had before, upon the Bombay Marine, until the outbreak of a new war a bare eighteen months later—sadly falsifying Pitt's expectation of a fifteen years' peace—once more made the presence of a British squadron in the East Indies necessary.

While Suffren returned to Europe, receiving, at the Cape, the homage, honourable both to him and to those who rendered it, of the captains of Commodore King's squadron, Hughes had long to wait for his relief: for Sir Peter Parker who was appointed to succeed him was lost with all hands in the *Cato* on his voyage out, and it was not until November 1784 that he was at last allowed to transfer the command to the senior captain, Andrew Mitchell, and to sail for England. He anchored at Spithead on May 16th, 1785, after a six years' absence from his home. His conduct had gained him the thanks of Parliament. His reply to the vote is not without interest, for it summarises what he had constituted

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cornwallis-West, *Life and Letters of Lord Cornwallis*, p. 162.

as his principal object and gives an indication of the conceptions which underlay his essentially defensive strategy and tactics.

“ Although I found it impracticable to ruin the French naval force in this country, every exertion in my power was made for that purpose consistent with the preservation of His Majesty’s squadron on which the fate of the National possessions in this country greatly, if not wholly, depend. I have, however, with the assistance of the brave men who served with me, been able effectually to disappoint and defeat all their designs of conquest in this part of the world.”

## APPENDIX I

### THE MARITIME DEFENCES OF INDIA UNDER THE EAST INDIA COMPANY, 1763-1783

THE defence of the Company's territory and trade in Indian Seas may be divided into two parts. There was the regular fighting force at the period under review called the Bombay Marine ; and there were the Company's armed trading ships. The latter again may be subdivided into three parts, namely, the strictly defensive armament for protection against pirates or the lesser classes of ships of war ; the arming of vessels taking out letters of marque or reprisal ; and, lastly, the question of finding some method of meeting the larger and more heavily armed ships which, as the two previous wars (1739-48 and 1756-63) had shown, the French fitted out : ships which in essence—and indeed in name—were their “ most capital ships.”

The history of the Bombay Marine and Indian Navy has been very fully recorded in Commander C. R. Low's well-known and exhaustive work. Nevertheless some points deserve attention here, for we are apt to lose sight, in the struggle between the battle squadrons of Hughes and Suffren, of the work which was being done in other parts of the Indian seas, and particularly on the Malabar Coast, by the Bombay Marine. It was due to the existence of that force that operations against Hyder in Mysore were possible, that the Royal Squadron, with its very scanty forces, did not have to make detachments to defend trade on the Malabar Coast, in the Persian Gulf and in the Malacca Straits, where the Company's convoys were wholly protected by the armed ships of the Company<sup>1</sup> itself, and that the Royal Squadron was not called on, to any appreciable degree, to support the operations in Bassein and Salsette. The fact that no spectacular battles were fought at sea by that force must not blind our eyes to the importance of the work of this detached flotilla ; for though in normal times when no European Naval forces were

<sup>1</sup> The *Osterley* 36, defending a convoy of trade ships, beat off an attack by the *Pourvoyeuse* 44, in October 1782.

in the Eastern Seas it was a navy in itself, with its own capital ships and lesser classes, in this war it was, strategically, a flotilla.

The vessels of the Marine at this time included "cruisers," "grabs," "gallivats," snows, ketches, bomb vessels of different types, cutters and schooners. The largest of these were what were called the "capital cruisers" of which there were two, the *Revenge* and *Defiance*. These were vessels built on European lines mounting twenty guns, nine and twelve-pounders. The "grabs" ("Gurabs") were large shoal draft coasting vessels of considerable beam, very convenient for use in the shoal waters of some of the ports on the west coast. They carried up to about twenty 9-pounders besides bow chasers.

They varied in size, some (e.g. the *Bombay* of 363 tons) were three-masted, but they were as a rule two-masted<sup>1</sup> craft. The *Gallivat* was a large sailing row-boat, built like a grab but smaller, usually of not more than 70 tons and carrying six to eight 3- or 4-pounders. The *Grab-ketches* and *bomb-ketches* were variants of the ketch according to the service for which they were required, mounting six to twelve of these smaller guns. The *Snows* were larger, mounting twelve to fourteen of the slightly larger 6-pounder guns.

When acting alone against the Country Powers, the Marine was a fleet in itself. Its "capital ships" were the 20-gun cruisers and large grabs, capable of tackling anything that might come out of Mangalore or Onore. Its "cruisers" were its lesser vessels down to the craft mounting five small pieces. Against a European Power like France, which brought her 40- to 70-gun-ships into these seas, the Marine formed a detachment. Under the protection of the main body of Royal ships which occupied the full attention of the main body of the enemy, they conducted the detached operations of expeditions, reinforcements of posts, and protection of trade against the minor forms of attack, in the western area of the Indian maritime theatre.

About one-third of the personnel at this time was European, excluding the soldiers who were allowed to all the vessels.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Orme, *History of the Military Transactions in India*, vol. i, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Personnel in 1766. European, 313; Topasses, 152; Lascars, 387. The complement of soldiers was 365 making a total personnel of 1,217. The guns numbered 196.

The proportion of Europeans was highest, as might be expected, in the capital cruisers and grabs,<sup>1</sup> but as the demands for European seamen grew with the wastage of war, these proportions changed and the Europeans on board fell as low as one-quarter. The Lascars were engaged annually, and paid off in May, when, owing to the strength of the south-west monsoon, little navigation and no operations took place on the west coast until mid-August, when the men were re-engaged. This, however, was found to result badly, for the best men were enlisted by the Country Powers on discharge, and the Marine then found itself fighting against the very men it had trained and made fit. Economy proved thus to be but ill-served, and after the campaign against Angria in 1754 the men were kept in pay all the year round, and employed, when not on board, as riggers in the Marine and Bander yards.

Valuable as the Marine proved itself in the many campaigns against the Country Powers, it was not a force in which the Naval Commanders-in-Chief reposed much confidence for service against the French privateers. Rainier in 1795 wrote: "The state of the Honourable Company's cruisers placed under the commanding officer of His Majesty's ships by order of the Court of Directors is such as to render the estimate of their force much inferior to H.M. ships of the same rate on account of their being manned with more than half natives, and the European part of their crews are perhaps more than half foreigners."<sup>2</sup> Again in 1801 he wrote, "Little dependence is to be placed on any assistance from East India Company's cruisers as your lordship has suggested to look after the privateers, being generally not half manned with Europeans and such as pass near the Sandheads are immediately laid hold on for other purposes."<sup>3</sup>

The function of the Marine was primarily the defence of the shipping which was employed in the transport of troops or the carriage of trade, against the Country Powers and the pirates. The General Instructions in 1766 ordered commanders to "take,

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in 1772. The *Revenge*, cruiser; 110 Europeans, 46 Lascars and Marines. Bombay, grab; 80 Europeans, 46 Lascars and Marines. Hawke, gallivat; 12 Europeans, 18 Lascars and Marines.

<sup>2</sup> Rainier to G. Nepean, October 12th, 1795.

<sup>3</sup> Rainier to Lord Spencer, September 29th, 1801.

burn, sink, or otherwise destroy all pirates you may at any time meet with infesting these seas, particularly the Sangarians, Cooleys and other Rovers harbouring to the northward and commonly cruising on that coast as far as the Gulfs of Mocha and Persia. . . . All people of the Sidi's fleet or otherwise belonging to the Moghul Emperor, and also all ships and vessels belonging to the Mahrattas, you are civilly to examine so as not to give them disgust, and they proving to be Moghul or Mahrattas give them no molestation but any aid or assistance they may stand in need of." They were to protect and give convoy to vessels under English colours and were licensed to wear them even as far as Macao.

*Force and Disposition.* The Marine in 1772 was first designed to consist of two "capital cruisers," three "second-rates," eight gallivats and various small craft—ketches, bombs, cutters and schooners. The proposed disposition of the main portion of this force was as follows :

*One capital cruiser, one second-rate and two gallivats* for convoy between Bombay and the Malabar ports.

*One capital cruiser, one second-rate and two gallivats* for convoy between Bombay and Surat.

*Two gallivats* for convoy of the salt trade.

*One gallivat* for the service of Tellicherry.

*One second-rate, three gallivats* to cruise off Bombay and give convoy to Scinde.

*Two schooners* at Basra.

Thus it will be seen that the Company recognised that it had the duties of making provision for the defence of its own interests at sea. So long as there was peace with European Powers it undertook the whole burden of defence from the Persian Gulf to China. When war with European Powers occurred, it dealt with the lesser navies of the Country Powers, either singly or in conjunction with the Royal Squadron, as at Mangalore in 1782 and 1783 : it co-operated with the squadron against French Settlements, as at Pondicherry and Mahé ; and it undertook cruising duties against attack by lesser craft or privateer. The East India Company's other contribution was that of accepting the obligation of sharing some of the cost of the Royal Squadron. It gave free freight to its stores, it gave allowances to the people



to bring their pay up to that of the local forces, and it maintained its own dockyard at Bombay.

As we have seen, the largest vessels in the Marine were 20-gun 350- to 400-ton cruisers and grabs. The merchant vessels to which commissions were issued by the Court of Directors for purposes of reprisal—privateers, in fact—were larger. Both before and during the Seven Years' War these had been of a practically uniform type: 499 tons, an armament of 26 or 28 guns, and a crew of 99 men<sup>1</sup> and this appears to have been the average armament of the ships of the size employed in trading, though the average tonnage of vessels in this employ ran to about 650 tons.

The experience of the two previous wars, and of the activity of the French at Mauritius in peace, suggested a need for an alteration in design. Both the French and Dutch employed larger ships for trade than we, and mounted heavier armaments. This too had been the custom of the "Old Company" before its amalgamation with the New ("John") Company. In the seven years before 1681 it had built sixteen great ships, all except one of which were between 900 and 1,300 tons and were capable of mounting from 60 to 80 guns; but since the amalgamation the building of smaller ships of under 700 tons had been followed. So it came about that upon an outbreak of war the French Company immediately put vessels to sea greatly superior to any that the British Company possessed. Thus, Labourdonnais had been able to bring a squadron of nine ships, one only of which was a King's ship, of which six were heavier, even though not armed up to their full capacity, than anything of the Company's. The French-India ships which came off Cuddalore in 1748 were of 64, 50, 44 and 40 guns, and of their Company ships which were to accompany d'Aché in 1756 seven were over 50 guns, four of over 40. Moreover, they carried guns of heavier

<sup>1</sup> The ships had to carry 20 men per hundred tons of burden. This was an established scale of manning. As examples, in 1751 the Court of Directors requested commissions might be granted to the commanders of the outward-bound ships Houghton and Prince of Wales, each of the size mentioned, for seizing pirates. In other years commissions were similarly issued for the Griffin, Boscawen (1748), Warren (1749), Shaftesbury (1750), Harcourt, Clinton, Walpole, Winchelsea, Falmouth, Egmont (1752), all of the same size and of 26 or 28 guns.

calibre—from 36- to 18-pounders against the 12- and 9-pounders of the trading ships of the Bombay Marine.

Thus while the French Company had their powerful capital ships—for such they were—the British had only lighter armed cruising ships and a flotilla ; and as these French ships, or at least some of them, were always present in the Eastern seas, France could put a superior sea force on the coast of India on the outbreak of war. It has been shown elsewhere<sup>1</sup> how this consideration gave support to the proposal for neutrality east of the Cape. There were, however, two alternatives. One, that the Crown should be persuaded to maintain a squadron of ships of the line in India ; the other that the Company should revert to its seventeenth century policy of using larger ships which would be fit for trade and capable in war of meeting the large ships of the French Company which were always to be found in Mauritius.

The Home government with its need for economy was not inclined to increase its peace establishment to provide a permanent squadron of ships of the line in the East when the French themselves had no Royal vessels there. If, therefore, the Company's possessions and trade were to be secured against the sudden attack by a superior force, the Company itself must take the steps necessary, " which can be done no otherwise than by having at hand in the East Indies a number of ships equal to theirs, ready to be fitted for war immediately, in order to oppose them at first setting out, and, if possible, to check them till an additional extra force can be sent from England." <sup>2</sup>

The Company had in its employ about seventy ships, some of them hired, some belonging to itself. Even though the larger mounted up to 40 guns they were not a match for a 30-gun frigate ; nor could any number of them fight a squadron of fifty and sixty gun ships such as the French might equip at the Mauritius. Out of the 45,000 tons thus required it was proposed to devote

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* p. 23 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> This and the scheme proposed are described in a paper marked " Considerations of the East India Company's employing large ships fit for trade or war " in the papers of Lord Sandwich. It is undated, but as Lord Sandwich went to the Admiralty in 1771, it is later than that date and it appears to be earlier than the outbreak of war in 1775.

30,000 to the building of twenty-five ships of 1,200 tons. These would be at least as strong as the French Company's capital ships, and there would generally be enough of them in the Eastern waters, in the normal course of trading, to meet the French in an emergency. As to their manning, they would carry in any case not less than 200 men, enough to man their upper batteries in peace or war, and as there was a normal outward flow of about 1,200 recruits a year to the Company's army in India, these would furnish enough hands to complete the personnel for the lower tiers on the outward voyage; and when in India their complement would be completed by troops from the garrisons, serving as marines. Lascars and Sepoys when serving with Europeans, it was said, had shown that they would do their duty.<sup>1</sup> Artillery for the lower tiers and such ammunition as was not perishable could be stocked in India. This would involve a certain and rather heavy capital outlay, but against this there was the cost which would be incurred in the alternative system of a permanent Royal Squadron, than which it would hardly be heavier: and it would have the advantage "that the ships being manned and commanded by the Company's own people, may they not be more orderly and answer to the purposes better than his Majesty's ships may do?" A Company Commander could not take the independent line, for instance, taken by Hughes, for he would be under the direct order of the Council. The military advantages and disadvantages of this would depend in the main on the degree of wisdom possessed by the members of the Council.

The narrow margin by which the command at sea was kept in dispute amply proves that the existence of such ships as these proposed would have been of benefit. The security of local trade against the lesser forms of attack is, in effect, an essential element in what to-day is called "local defence," though the use of the term is only too commonly incorrectly confined to territorial objectives—the defence of harbours or defence against raiding attacks and invasion. Little as the Bombay Marine figures in the histories which concentrate their attention—and necessarily—upon the more impressive movements and battles of the

<sup>1</sup> The Monmouth in the severe fighting of the battle of April 12th was largely manned by native ratings.

principal forces at sea, it played nevertheless an invaluable part in furnishing forces for those detachments which drain a squadron of its essential auxiliaries, and without which trade is shackled and the mobility of the army destroyed.

Thanks to the Bombay Marine the losses in the western waters of India were comparatively small. The trade was convoyed down the coast, and when privateers appeared at particular spots ships were sent promptly to deal with them. In November 1781 Commodore Empson sailed in the *Revenge* to rid the seas of three French privateers who had taken up cruising stations in the three focal spots off Socotra, Aden and Ras el Hadd ; and when two others,<sup>1</sup> which had been cruising in Malacca Straits, arrived at Goa for a refit, vessels of the Bombay Marine were at once sent to cruise off Goa. Yet all trade could not be convoyed, and both Mahratta and Mysorean vessels, from 20-gun ships to ketches and row boats, took a certain toll, particularly on those occasions when the vessels of the Marine were required for the escort of troops.

On the Bengal side matters were less satisfactory. Unlike the Bombay Government, the Governments of Bengal and Madras maintained no forces at sea for their own defence, and French privateers had a happy time. Even after the Royal Squadron arrived this continued, and dissatisfaction at the want of protection was expressed. In Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* "Mercator" makes bitter complaint on September 16th, 1781, "that for near twelve months the coast between Madras and Palmiras has been invested by French privateers who have unmolested reigned triumphant to the great impediment of trade, which impediment it was hoped would be relieved when an English fleet arrived at the coast. But the A——l seems deaf to every complaint of this kind . . . however if he so barefacedly neglects this part of his duty it is to be hoped that the G——t here and at Madras will not theirs but require such a protection as the service demands. . . ." Unfortunately the Admiral, like many other British Admirals, had not been provided with the number of small frigates necessary ; he had but five, of which two had only joined him a few months earlier and one

<sup>1</sup> The *Philippe*, 22 guns, 218 men ; and *Océan*, 4 guns, 120 men.

(the *Chaser*) was a prize taken from *Hyder*. If the Bengal and Madras Governments had copied the example of the Government of Bombay, and provided themselves with a Marine for their own "local defence," they would not have sustained the losses of which Mercator complained. Their only share of doing anything for themselves that the writer has been able to discover was the fitting out of one privateer, the "*Death or Glory*," of 22 six-pounders, 12 cohorns, 20 swivels, to be manned by 120 men; but as the advertisement for men continued for many weeks, it appears to have met with little response. This, however, even if the vessel ever sailed, was of little service in the defence of trade, for it was not other privateers that she was in search of, nor was her object anything except booty.

## APPENDIX II

### DE BUSSY'S APPRECIATION OF THE PROJECTED EXPEDITION TO INDIA IN 1781

THE successive reinforcements in men and in ships sent by your Majesty for the defence of the Isles de France and Bourbon leave at the moment no grounds for anxiety ; and in spite of the additional strength given to the British by the squadron which sailed last year under the Command of Admiral Hughes, the English have not been able to make any attempt this year against these Colonies.

In these circumstances, the Vicomte de Souillac, knowing the position of the enemy, felt able last December to detach some of your Majesty's ships and frigates that were in the port of the Isle de France for a cruise in the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope. This season was the most favourable for the capture of merchantmen belonging to the English Company. There was also the possibility that the Commander of this squadron might be able to intercept the men-of-war, *Asia* and *Rippon*, due to leave the Coromandel coast last March, a fact known to this officer and one that determined him to remain where he was till the end of May.

But whatever might be the success of this squadron it cannot be pretended that it could ever be proportionate to the expense attaching to a cruise in these waters. The only way to employ the squadron usefully is to add to it new forces with which British possessions could be attacked.

I have already described to your Majesty the advantages to be gained from a well-combined expedition against India. The most powerful Princes offer to join us against the common enemy as soon as they see us appear in force ; and, if the revolution were such as one could expect were suitable measures adopted, it would, by depriving the British of a part of those establishments from which they derive their chief resources, certainly compel the Court of London to ask for peace. .

Information that I believe to be trustworthy places the English strength in India at nine ships of which six under Admiral Hughes reached the Coromandel coast at the beginning of this year. Their land forces consist of 8,000 European troops and about 50,000 Sepoys. But their forces are divided among the different establishments possessed by the British in Bengal, on the Coromandel coast, on the coast of Malabar and elsewhere; so that if a body of your Majesty's troops were suddenly to appear in some part of India it would have time to organise and to establish itself there and to seize the settlements in the neighbourhood before the enemy had assembled the forces needed to oppose their advance.

This expedition needs 8,000 men and ten ships of the line.

By leaving two ships to guard the Isle de France, four of the six now there would be available, so that it would only be necessary to send six from Europe with a few frigates and other light vessels.

The troops would be provided partly from those already in the Isle de France; thus, from the Colony would be taken the :

Regiment of Austrasie which can be put at	1,100 men	.	.	.	1,100 men
Two Battalions of the Regiment of the Isle de France	.	.	.	.	1,400 "
The 3rd Legion des Volontaires Estrangers de la Marine	.	.	.	.	400 "
Les Volontaires de Bourbon	.	.	.	.	200 "
					<hr/>
					3,100 "
From France might be sent :					
Six battalions du Département de la Guerre	.	.	.	.	3,300 "
The Regiment of Pondicherry and the two Companies of the Artillery	.	.	.	.	
de l'Inde	.	.	.	.	1,100 "
Eight picquets of dragoons	.	.	.	.	400 "
A detachment of the Royal Artillery Corps	.	.	.	.	500 "
					<hr/>
Total	.	.	.	.	8,400 "

Besides these 8,400 regular troops and a force of 1,000 natives taken from the Isle de France about 10,000 Sepoys will be raised in India, who will be armed and disciplined in the European manner and commanded by white officers and non-commissioned officers.

There remain about 2,000 trained men in the Isle de France. These, together with the Militia, and the two ships of the line of which I have spoken above, will be enough for its defence, and all the more so in that the appearance in India of your

Majesty's forces will certainly not allow the English to make any attempt against this colony.

February is the most favourable time for the departure of any Colonies situated beyond the Cape of Good Hope ; the ships, frigates and transport should therefore be ready to sail by that time, reaching the Isle de France in July. After resting for six weeks or two months the squadron would start again with the troops for the coast of Malabar.

The advantages of attacking at this point are :

1. To arrive there during the season favourable for immediate action.

2. To carry if possible by assault the fortress of Bombay and to have a port where your Majesty's squadron would find security and the means to refit in case of accidents due to weather or war, without having to return to the Isle de France.

3. To capture Surat (a rich town with every sort of commodity), should it be found that Bombay can only be captured by regular siege.

4. To be able to detach, after taking these places, a body of white troops for service with the army of Nadjat-Kan, the General of the Mogol Emperor, who only awaits this reinforcement to attack the English in the Upper Ganges.

5. To induce Aider-ali-Kan by a similar operation to invade the Province of Arcate and to advance on Madras, the squadron attacking the place at the same time from the sea.

The plan of operations to be adopted by the commander-in-chief can only be determined by circumstances. I would only observe to your Majesty that in my opinion it seems essential that he should be sufficiently equipped to enable him to maintain superiority at sea, for the purpose both of compelling the enemy to divide his land forces and of instilling the Princes of India with the confidence needed for an early revolutionary success.

It is easy to appreciate that, should the squadron have a sufficiently marked superiority over that of the English on either coast, the English establishments would automatically collapse and fall into your Majesty's hand.

It remains to estimate the cost of this expedition.

I shall not take into account the siege and field artillery which



your Majesty will be begged to have supplied by the Ministry of War.

The return or replacement of this artillery by the Ministry of Marine would be effected on the return of the expedition or the establishment of peace.

The same applies to the munitions with the exception of the powder, the cost of which will be met from a special grant allotted for the purpose of this expedition.

The provisions needed for the ships and frigates will be paid for from the same grant.

The rest of the expenses will be for the pay of the troops for two years, for provisions, for equipment and medical stores for the hospitals, sheets, cloth and other supplies and freightage for the transport of troops, munitions and supplies. The total cost of all this amounts to about 20 millions.

Of this sum about 14 millions will be expended at the beginning of next year ; the rest, consisting of freightage and expenses incurred in the Isle de France, will not be paid till the end of 1782.

I recognise that in the present circumstances this expenditure may seem heavy, but I beg your Majesty to allow me to make the following observations on this point.

1. The superiority of the united forces of the two allied Powers in Europe and America over those of the common enemy will probably prevent him from sending reinforcements to India, so that it is permissible to expect that the expedition will meet with the success that should attend it.

2. Since the Force which I propose that your Majesty should send to India will have to rely solely upon its own resources it seems to be absolutely indispensable that it should take with it in specie two years' pay and enough money to meet the cost of subsistence during one year until success is reached or until treaties made in the country can provide the resources needed for either object.

3. Next winter your Majesty will of course have to send to the Isle de France fresh levies of soldiers and seamen, money and supplies of all kinds. It will also be necessary to arrange escorts for the transports ; and it seems to me so important that the convoy should safely reach its destination that I cannot

hesitate to propose that your Majesty should place it under the protection of two men-of-war and a frigate. This escort will be in addition to the force protecting the Isle de France, though the increased expense on that account will be unproductive.

4. If we succeed in capturing the English establishments the profits they will render will cover, and more than cover, the entire cost of the expedition : it is even possible that the reimbursements may accrue soon enough to repay your Majesty's Treasury part of any expenditure that may have been effected and also relieve the Treasury of some of the cost of the war for the preservation of the Isles de France and Bourbon.

5. In order to avoid at the moment placing too heavy a charge upon the financial resources of your Majesty, I think that the best way of meeting expenses would be to raise a loan the proceeds of which would be solely devoted to the purpose in view. This loan could be floated for four years ; the interest on it could be covered from the payment which the Ministry of War should make to the Ministry of Marine in respect of the normal pay of the regiments employed on the expedition. In four years' time we may allow ourselves to hope either that the forces of your Majesty will have brought about a revolution in India, in which case we shall acquire, in the way of contributions arising from the concessions gained by the revolution, the funds necessary for the repayment of the loan ; or peace will be made, in which case the expedition should prove a powerful inducement to oblige the English not only to return the establishments taken by them, but perhaps to re-establish our respective possessions as they were before the war of 1757.

The expense will certainly not be a heavy burden upon your Majesty's finances. [*Note*.—The Company's revenues amounted in 1755 to 6,400,000 (livres) excluding those derived from possessions in Bengal and the Malabar coast.]

This loan could be raised at Genoa on securities furnished by the Finance Department. It would thus be floated without harm either to the national credit or to the operations of this department.

6. Lastly, in considering the necessity for making provision for the defence of the Isles de France and Bourbon, it is clear that if the war lasts two or three more years, the cost of preserv-

ing these colonies by maintaining a squadron and a considerable number of troops will be much greater than the cost of the proposed expedition, and will produce no real gain; were the money needed for defence employed instead in bringing about a revolution in India, we could gain from such a course of action both the repayment of the total cost of the expedition and a position infinitely more favourable for compelling the English to return, on the conclusion of peace, the establishments they have taken from us and of which your Majesty's forces may have already gained possession.

Such are the considerations that I have the honour to submit to your Majesty and in respect of which I beg that your Majesty would honour me by your orders.

## APPENDIX III

### DE BUSSY'S STATUS IN COMMAND

THE question of the command of what is called a combined operation is one that has not infrequently been raised since the late war. Invoking the sacrosanctity of the principle of "unity of command" it has been urged that in all cases in which naval and military forces are employed the command should be vested in one individual; either the sailor or the soldier. One distinguished authority who himself took part in the operation at the Dardanelles has indeed definitely ascribed that failure to the fact that there were two commanders; or, in other words, that the officer commanding the naval forces was not directly under the orders of the officer commanding the troops.

In the case of de Bussy's expedition to India, the question of the French command arose, and was settled in favour of a single command. The arguments adduced in its favour and the manner in which it worked in practice may be reviewed.

When the despatch of troops to the East was considered by the French Ministers, the first and most obvious question asked was—what would such forces achieve? in what manner would this employment of force contribute to the success of the war as a whole? In other words, what was its object?

The object was to bring about a general revolution in India, the result of which would probably be decisive. The English would be driven out of India, the loss of India and its trade would be a blow so serious that they would be forced to sue for peace.

"L'objet principal était la révolution de l'Inde contre les Anglais."<sup>1</sup> But even though it should fail to attain this principal object, it would, by the losses it would inflict upon British trade, seriously weaken the British power to continue to resist.

Following this decision as to the ultimate object the next question—the same question that has so often been a bone of

<sup>1</sup> De Castries to Suffren, April 6th, 1783. 'B. 4, 197, p. 357.

contention between two schools of British strategical thought—was, what nature of force was necessary to provide this revolution and render it effective? Was it necessary that troops should be sent, and if so how many? Alternatively, would it be sufficient to send a superior squadron which, defeating the British at sea and commanding those waters, would stop any British reinforcements, ruin British credit, prevent the payment of her native armies, and so enable the armies of the Native Princes to destroy, unaided by Western military reinforcements, the British Armies, and to reconquer the territories under British rule? Would the appearance of the squadron, or the evidence it would rapidly give of its power, suffice to bring about a general coalition against Britain and with it the revolution which was desired?

De Bussy, the veteran Commander who had made a name and a fortune serving in the wars of Dupleix, was naturally consulted; for no man then in France had a greater experience of India and its problems than he, although in the twenty-two years which had elapsed since he had left the country many great changes had taken place both in politics and persons. Assuming the object to be the creation of such a revolution as would result in the total expulsion of the British, de Bussy was asked whether he, in command of six or seven thousand men, could bring about this situation. His reply was that the number was insufficient. On an earlier occasion when he had been consulted he had stated that eight or nine thousand were needed, and only because he was aware of the difficulty of raising this large number, and of the fact that his own name and reputation counted for some thousands, had he asked for so few as that. Nevertheless he would be prepared to undertake the expedition with the six or seven thousand which it appeared was all that could be provided; but he definitely said that he would not accept the responsibility for its success.<sup>1</sup>

He was next asked whether it would not be sufficient to establish naval superiority alone. His reply was that naval force alone could not achieve the aim. Moreover, besides being unduly costly it would be useless and contribute nothing to success

<sup>1</sup> "Mais en raison du moindre nombre de troupes il ne peut être responsable du succès," *Colonies*, C. 2, 161, p. 53.

unless the Commander of such naval forces as would be needed had the "most precise and severe orders wholly to subordinate the operations at sea to those on land, and to refuse nothing in men or anything else which the Commander-in-Chief might ask." Success would depend on the first blow being struck as hard as possible, and this was possible only under a single command.

Thus a supreme and absolute single authority was, in his opinion, necessary for the General. The next question he was asked was, how far, in a geographical sense, should that authority extend? Would it be sufficient if it covered the theatre of immediate operations on the coast of India? or must it extend to the Islands or even to the Cape of Good Hope itself? His answer was categorical and clear. Absolute authority was necessary over land and sea from the Cape to the East of Canton. The Cape itself was an indispensable base, which must be included within the supreme military command. Finally, he said, in order to leave no doubt as to his position either in the eyes of Native Princes or in his surroundings the General should be given the rank of Lieutenant-General by Land and Sea, without which, de Bussy remarked, he would suffer much from opposition and obstruction by the naval command.

These arguments convinced the Minister. All of the demands were agreed to. Experience had certainly given reason for Ministers to take some steps which would ensue co-operation, full and complete, between the land and the sea forces. Labourdonnais, gallant man that he was, had quarrelled with and abandoned Dupleix. D'Aché had left Pondicherry to its fate and made no effort to break the investment. D'Orves had made a fruitless appearance on the coast and his departure had in all probability engendered feelings of profound distrust in the mind of Hyder Ali which might well have spread through India. Instructions were therefore sent to d'Orves<sup>1</sup> informing him that on the arrival of de Bussy the supreme command would be vested in him.

On the death of d'Orves these instructions passed to Suffren. He considered them wrong in principle. His objections were expressed in a short letter to Castries. "According to M.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Appendix V, p. 416.

Bussy's patent I am to be under his orders. I do not object except for the reason that no good to the Service on land can come of it, though I can assure you that I will do my best to prevent harm arising. Two possible conditions may exist: one in which a general-at-sea is acquainted with his profession, the other in which he is not. In the first case, why put him under the orders of someone who is ignorant of it? in the second, why leave him in command? For of what use will any orders be from someone more ignorant than himself? and who will in addition be on shore when he is at sea?"

De Castries—who, it may be remarked, had by then received Suffren's letter of August 1781, complaining of the indiscipline of the naval captains—replied in the following terms: "If M. de Bussy has joined you, you will by now have seen that the authority over the forces at sea which the King has thought fit to give him relates only to the operations of the army, to which you will agree it was impossible not to subordinate those of the squadron. The principal object is the revolution against the English in India. The squadron must co-operate in this and, for that reason, is only an accessory to the operations on land. France has twice lost India on account of the immoderate desire to return to the Islands, and, until yourself, no naval commander has had the strength to resist the demands. In view of this it is impossible to give authority, which does not subordinate everything to the operations on land, and to those who have the direction of those operations. Here, then, is more reason than enough to satisfy a fighting man such as yourself, and to convince him now necessary it was for the King to give the orders about which you write and which do not in any way deprive you of your immediate authority over and regulations of your ship."<sup>1</sup>

Thus there was not only a question of principle involved, but one also of personality. Discipline was lax, as Suffren's own letters had shown. The captains of the squadron, who preferred the pleasures and the profits of the life at the Islands, could bring pressure directly by personal representation, and indirectly by disobedience and failure to do their utmost, upon their Commander, which might prove greater than he could resist. Suffren himself knew what these were. "Vous ne pourriez

<sup>1</sup> Castries to Suffren, April 4th, 1783.

imaginer, Monseigneur, tous les ressorts, toutes les petites ruses qu'on a employé pour me faire revenir. Vous n'en serez point surpris si vous savez qu'à l'Isle de France l'argent vaut le 18 per cent., et, quand on fait des affaires infiniment, plus, et pour cela il faut y estre." <sup>1</sup> Apart, however, from this personal factor, particular to the situation and time to the case in point, did the fundamental principles of command render it essential that the naval commander should be under the order of the military Commander-in-Chief in all phases strategical and tactical of the operations in the Indian Ocean ?

For some part of the campaign there was good reason. The question is, what was the point of demarcation ?

It was for Ministers to decide whether an expedition should be undertaken. They alone, seeing the war as a whole, could determine in what part of the world the forces available could most effectually be used to achieve the great object in the war—compelling Britain to make peace on terms favourable to the interests of France. Their decision was that India was a place in which a decisive stroke could be delivered. That stroke was the expulsion of the English. That expulsion was to be effected by a combined effort of the Native Princes and French military force. The issue was to be fought out on land. In what part of that particular territory the French forces would most effectually co-operate with those of the Country Powers was not a question that would be decided in Paris. It must be made by one conversant with the affairs of India ; it was not solely military, but a combination of political and military strategy. A Clive, a Dupleix or a Warren Hastings might indeed be the person most apt for making this decision, a decision in which an accurate acquaintance with the relations with the several Country Powers was essential.

De Bussy, a soldier experienced in Indian campaigns and one whose knowledge, although not up-to-date, was considerable, and whose reputation was very great, was thus a right and proper person to whom to confide the general direction of the campaign. It was as proper for him to select the place in India where the local effort should be made, as it was for Ministers to select India as the theatre where the National effort should be made. This,

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to Castries, September 29th, 1782.



however, is by no means to say that he should conduct the execution of all the operations by land and sea.

Logical as the arrangement is of having some single person in direction—or, as Suffren in a later letter expressed it, “to play the part of Vice-roy”—the logic weakens when we descend from the higher planes of strategy to the lower planes of command in specific operations. While it was right that the selected chief should be in a position to ensure that there was no dissipation of effort upon irrelevant operations on land and sea—the capture of a town for booty, a fruitless “*guerre de chicane*,” or a search for merchant ships for prize money—it was not right that he should be able to interfere in the actual performance of the operation of the naval forces; for he would be handling an instrument with which he was necessarily wholly unacquainted. No man other than one experienced in the use of a force can direct the execution of the task. The sea officer commanding the military operations of the siege of a fortress, and the land officer directing the movements of a fleet against another fleet, are equally out of place. Cartagena in 1741 and Pondicherry in 1748 had given examples of this. What is required is that the object shall be selected by the person or persons whose position and knowledge render them most competent to make that selection; and that responsibility for execution shall lie in the hands of those competent to use the instrument employed; the troops on land; the squadron at sea. The claim for an officer of one service to give orders to an officer of another in a combined operation is, in stark fact, no more than a claim to override professional opinion in matters purely professional.

Looking at the actual campaign, is it possible to draw any conclusions as to the advantages of a single command in such a campaign?

If “Unity of Command” were necessary after de Bussy’s arrival, it was no less necessary before. The mere addition of 2,500 troops did not alter the object of the Franco-Mysorean operation. The principal land commander was then Hyder Ali and with him was the French Commander, M. Piveron. In February 1783, an expedition under General Mathews descended from Bombay on the Malabar coast, and by a brilliant series of operations ‘captured Coondapur, Hyderghur Nagar,

Bednore, and Mangalore and placed Seringapatam itself, Hyder's capital, in the hands of a rival. The land Commanders pressed Suffren hard to send some of his ships to the Malabar coast to relieve the situation; and had they possessed absolute authority could have forced him to go. But he being independent of their orders was able to refuse to take a step which would have divided his squadron when it was essential it should be united to meet the British force, and would have exposed a detachment to the risk of almost certain destruction by the British on that coast. It was, however, only his having the power to use the squadron in the manner best adapted to obtain the command at sea, upon which the whole campaign depended, that enabled him to resist the pressing demands from the Dutch and French to undertake operations for their security.

With the coming of de Bussy the opportunity for exercising supreme authority arose. Early in May 1783 the Commander-in-Chief, in want of provisions and munitions and anxious lest the inactivity of the squadron—which was still refitting—should have an untoward effect on his Indian army, sent an order to Suffren to join him off Cuddalore with the squadron. This order Suffren did not obey. He did not do so because it would in his opinion have jeopardised the position at sea. He knew that Hughes with a superior squadron was to the southward. He did not know what Hughes's intentions were, but he saw plainly that if the French squadron went to Cuddalore with the enemy in that position the English might recover Trincomali, garrisoned though it was by about 500 men, as easily as the French had taken it from them. To lose Trincomali meant to lose all. "*Si nous n'avions pas eu Trinquemalaye nous n'aurions point le Brillant et le Vengeur, nous n'aurions pu refaire toutes nos ferures de gouvernails &c.*"<sup>1</sup> But he recognised fully the need of doing all he could to succour the army. He sent two transports laden with the stores, under a fast sailing escort, to Cuddalore. "I thought," he writes, "that this was the surest way of helping Cuddalore without risking Trincomali on which our existence in the Indian seas depends. I considered that in disobeying M. Bussy's orders, given under different circumstances,

<sup>1</sup> Suffren to de Castries, e.g. May 1783. Explaining the importance of not exposing Trincomali to risk of capture.

I should be fulfilling his wishes." The authority to command was not only useless but dangerous. Useless, because de Bussy was necessarily ignorant of whether it was practicable for Suffren to work his way with his squadron from Trincomali in the face of a superior force of the whereabouts of which he had no information. Dangerous, because such an order given to a man physically brave but morally weak, might have been taken as binding, and an operation which would have ruined the squadron—and with it the army—might have been undertaken from lack of moral courage to disobey. The power which de Bussy needed was that of informing his colleague at sea of his needs. If the naval commander's orders from higher authority should be to co-operate to his utmost towards a common object, he could not abstain from giving such help as it lay in his power to give without breach of his orders from the King. But whether he could throw in the provisions at all, and whether he should do so with his whole squadron or a part only, were matters on which he, and he only, could possibly form a correct judgment.

The situation became worse. The British squadron returned from the south and lay off Cuddalore blocking it completely by sea. De Bussy needed help. This time he sent no orders but a request ; and the request was so worded as to throw the whole responsibility of taking action upon Suffren. De Bussy pointed out, though unnecessarily, the danger Suffren would be in with fifteen ships to eighteen, the fact that the loss of the squadron would mean the loss of the army. Suffren made the choice. His squadron was just refitted. He fully realised the plight of the army. Orders or no orders, he was prepared to take the risk of giving help. De Bussy's power to give an absolute order was in this case unnecessary ; he did not attempt to avail himself of the power. Without it, what he desired to be done was done. It is true that in Suffren there was an exceptional man and that to him no orders to do what was right were necessary. But it is not less true that, orders or no orders, a lesser man than Suffren could not have performed that remarkable feat. Either a reply would have been sent that an inferior force, situated as his was, could not perform the task ; or, though convinced of the impossibility of getting through, the commander would sullenly have obeyed, but would have found a ready excuse for not pressing

home his attempt ; for do what one may the human element will always remain the deciding factor. The only value which possession of an absolute authority over another and different service confers, in the actual operation of a campaign, is that it enables the supreme commander to over-ride the professional judgment of his subordinate, in a question on which he himself is necessarily ignorant. He can order battleships to attack forts, as Wentworth desired Vernon to do at Cartagena, or to force a passage of a strait defended as a modern strait can be. It is true that no sagacious military commander would act in direct opposition to the professional opinion of his naval colleague ; to confer upon him the power to do so is therefore totally unnecessary ; while to confer it upon one who is liable so to act is palpably dangerous in the highest degree.

In conclusion, some opinions of Warren Hastings relating to the responsibility for single direction may be quoted. Lord Macartney had endeavoured to obtain the right to direct the military operations and Coote had made serious complaints of the obstruction he had suffered ; and had told the Governor-General that unless the military operations were left under his sole control he would not continue in command. Hastings thereupon wrote to Macartney desiring that Coote should have "an entire and unparticipated command over all the forces acting under your authority (that is to say the forces on land) in the Carnatic." This should even be extended to "the conciliation of the dependent chiefs in the Carnatic, the acceptance of terms offered by those of the enemy, and in general such other acts as do not fall within the express line of military command but which may contribute to the success of the operations, either by adding strength to our own arms or weakening those which may be opposed to them. In all such cases the officer who is charged with the conduct of the war, especially if he has shown himself deserving of that confidence in an eminent degree, ought we conceive to be trusted with an implicit discretion."

"We are sensible," he continued, "at this time that every government must of course possess an ultimate and over-ruling authority and that the right of extending such authority as is inherent in it must also be invariable and perpetual notwith-

standing any restrictions which it may impose upon itself for particular purposes. And cases may possibly happen in which the instant interposition of that authority may be absolutely necessary for the safety of the State without either a participation or communication with the person entrusted with the military command. When such cases do occur, they will of course take effect from their own weight and urgency, and it will depend on your judgment alone to determine whether they be such as demand your sole and separate interposition. We mean not to prescribe the application of this rule in such cases and we hope there will be no occasion for it : but in all others we wish that the whole conduct of the war may be left entirely to the management and direction of the Commander-in-Chief at least to the officer who now holds that station and whom we consider is entitled to such a mark of confidence in the most distinguished manner."

Thus the military commander in the Carnatic had great powers. While it was not for him to decide whether peace were made with the Mahrattas it was left to him to decide in what theatre, and in what manner, the military forces on land were employed. But his power of command was confined to the land. When operations included the use of sea forces, co-operation, not command, was invoked. It was never supposed by Coote that he could decide, in opposition to a sea officer, whether a squadron could lie on an open coast in a stormy season, whether ships could continue in service without docking, or could sail to meet an enemy without being repaired. Nor did he attempt to determine the operations at sea necessary in defeating the attempts which an enemy squadron could make. Such matters were not within his competence.

It is, however, plain that the want of a more effective system for determining the principal object of the combined land and sea forces exposed the British possessions and interests in India to serious risks. The decision as to whether Negapatam or Chillumbrum was the more important objective was made on purely military grounds. The significance of the two Dutch harbours to command at sea could not be expected to be fully appreciated. Such a decision was one to be made in a joint consultation in which comparison could be made in the results

of the various courses of action. The effects of a withdrawal from Chillumbrum, the risk to which Cuddalore would be exposed, and the effect of these upon the security of the British position in Madras, could be fully appreciated by a purely military Council; but that body of able soldiers could not be expected to appreciate the full effect upon the situation at sea if the enemy squadron, superior as it was known to be, should have the additional advantage of the possession of positions of such great significance as Trincomali and Negapatam. The mere appointment of an independent authority, such as the Governor, would not provide a solution: for he no more than anyone else could be in a position to appreciate all the elements of which the naval problem was composed. The presence of the seaman was necessary. Provided he was present there was no need for an independent arbitrator or chairman, who would be needed only if there were questions of a political nature affecting the strategy; which, in the case of the actual operations in the Carnatic and on the Coromandel coast, there were not.

## APPENDIX IV

### INSTRUCTIONS TO THE VICOMTE DE SOUILLAC AND COMTE D'ORVES

THE declaration of war which England has made upon Holland, and the armaments which she has in preparation, render it probable that the English, aware as they are of the weakened condition of the Cape of Good Hope, will make efforts to seize it.

It is as yet unknown what forces England intends to send thither. It is openly announced that they will not send more than three or four ships with a body of troops, which would be insufficient to capture that Colony if it were defended ; but which will suffice if it receives no help from France. Consequently His Majesty has decided to dispatch five ships of the line and from 1,000 to 1,200 men from Europe.

The English squadron in India consists of five ships at the most. It is known for a certainty that four ships which previously formed part of that squadron have returned to Europe. Thus the squadron commanded by M. d'Orves has a superiority over these two separated squadrons which will continue so long as they do not unite and will still continue if the English squadron, on the one hand, and the French on the other, effect a junction.

If, apart from the inferiority in which the English are at this moment, one considers the time it will take for reinforcements to reach the English ; and if to that one adds the danger to which the English establishments in India would incur if the squadron were to abandon those seas without knowing what part the King's squadron in the Indies would play, one can conclude that Admiral Hughes will not leave India weakened by a withdrawal of white troops without which he could undertake nothing against the Cape of Good Hope.

The English moreover would try in vain to effect a junction between the ships coming out from Europe and those already in Asia. There is no point within reach of the Cape which would serve as a rendezvous for the two squadrons. St. Helena,

until the end of August, is too far to windward of the Cape. If the English squadron went to Rodriguez or Madagascar to make the junction it would lose too much time. Hence, we may assume that the squadron in India will not leave the waters they have to defend and that it is from Europe only that the forces allocated for the attack upon the Cape will come.

In order to resist the capture, and to balance the forces which the English may have during the campaign in Asia, and even to give superiority over them, His Majesty is sending a squadron of five ships, of which one is of 74 and three of 64 guns, under the order of the Chevalier de Suffren.

These ships will escort a convoy on board of which there will be :

A detachment of the regiment of Austrasie, taken in the Protée	
and which is returning to the Islands	400 men
The regiment of Pondicherry of about	700 „
A detachment of artillery of	100 „
Total	1,200 „

The instructions which will be given to Sieur de Conway, Brigadier and Colonel of the Regiment of Pondicherry, to whom the King is giving the command of these 1,200 men, of which a copy is attached, will inform MM. de Souillac and d'Orves of the arrangements that have been made to fulfil the primary object of giving help to the Cape.

When M. de Suffren, commanding the squadron, shall have reached his first destination, he will dispatch a small vessel to inform MM. de Souillac and d'Orves of the condition in which he found this Colony, together with the dispositions made for its defence.

The King leaves it to MM. de Souillac and d'Orves to arrange such operations as they consider most useful to undertake—either to sail to the Cape and, by joining the five ships sent from France, add to their strength with the object of intercepting the British squadron with the convoy which it is taking to India, which departure cannot be delayed ; or to order them to join him after they shall have provided for the security of the Cape, and then proceed to India ; or, finally, to leave for India without waiting for them, in order to undertake some enterprise against the commerce and the possessions of the



English on any part of the coasts. If this last is done M. d'Orves will give orders to M. de Suffren as to the course of conduct he is to pursue.

Vicomte de Souillac and Comte d'Orves should be informed that, according to the instructions given to the Chevalier de Suffren, commanding the five ships coming from Europe (of which a copy is attached), that officer has directions that if the winds blowing at the Cape admit of his attacking St. Helena before having received any orders from them, he is to seek means of attacking that English establishment. Thus MM. de Souillac and d'Orves must take into account this possibility in any proposals or orders they may give M. Suffren. It is, however, to be expected that he will not have sufficient troops for that undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

A despatch vessel has been sent on January 2nd, 1781, to convey the order to M. de Souillac for preparing the Royal ships for a campaign of six months' duration. Duplicates of this order are attached.

The frigate<sup>2</sup> which carries the actual orders will leave Brest on March 15th and proceed to the Cape of Good Hope, where Sieur Chevreau in collaboration with the Dutch Governor will make the necessary arrangements for the arrival of the reinforcement, according to his instructions (of which a copy is attached), after which she will proceed to the Isle de France, where she is expected to arrive in about the beginning of July (1781).

If private letters are to be believed the squadron at Mauritius was due to sail for India in November 1780, but as the winds will have obliged it to return to the islands in April 1781 it is expected that if it has been able to carry out the orders which were sent on January 2nd, it will be ready to take the sea again on the arrival of the frigate which has been sent.

<sup>1</sup> A later order of March 17th, issued in consequence of some information received later, directed Suffren to proceed direct to Mauritius immediately after disembarking his troops at the Cape. This may have been the news of Baillie's disaster, which naturally would indicate the desirability of arriving as soon as possible in India, where the situation offered great hopes of success if command of the sea could be established.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the *Fine*.

Taking all this into consideration the King authorises Vicomte de Souillac and the Comte d'Orves to withdraw from the islands and embark on board the squadron such a number of men as they may consider necessary, leaving only enough force there for security.

According to the latest returns it appears that they could withdraw about 1,500 men. In that case, the troops would be composed as follows :

Regiment of Austrasie . . . . .	500 men
Volunteers of Bourbon . . . . .	200 „
Artillery . . . . .	50 „
A battalion from the Regiment of the Isle de France, completed to . . . . .	750 „
Total . . . . .	<u>1,500</u>

The King, in leaving to these general officers the decision as to the operation they consider most valuable and redounding most to the glory of His Majesty's arms, ordains that they shall attack the English, either separated or concentrated, whenever it may be possible to do so without incurring the destruction of their own forces.

His Majesty's wisdom has not enabled him to decide upon any particular operation. He is aware that at a distance of 4,000 miles it would be imprudent to select positions to attack, and he confines himself in consequence to informing the Comte d'Orves that what he expressly forbids is inactivity ; unfortunate events and inaction will be equally contrary to his views ; and that thus he restricts himself to ordering M. d'Orves to profit by the superiority over, or equality with, the English he should possess this year in the Asian seas to ruin their commerce and destroy those of their settlements that he can attack with success.

His Majesty desires at the same time to assure Count d'Orves that he will not hold him responsible for untoward events that may arise : but that he is only held blameable if he does not employ all the resources which his will and courage can inspire to render the campaign equally profitable and glorious to his arms.

By the hand of the King—approved.

(Copy, no date.)

## APPENDIX V

### DRAFT OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE FRENCH NAVAL AND MILITARY COMMANDERS IN INDIA <sup>1</sup>

THE knowledge of Asiatic politics which M. de Bussy has acquired, his success during the last war in India, and lastly the wishes of our Allies in that part of Asia, have decided the King to appoint him to the Command-in-Chief of all the forces by land and sea in India : and His Majesty can but promise himself the happiest results from the choice he has made of this officer for this service, and the means with which he has furnished him. At the same time, however, he thinks it advisable to foresee the possibility of either the death of M. de Bussy or of his being unable, owing to unforeseen events, to fulfil the mission confided to him ; and for that purpose to acquaint the commanders of his land and sea forces with his intention as to the conduct they should observe in such a case.

The convoy leaving Brest in the beginning of next December <sup>2</sup> is expected to arrive at Mauritius in May, or at the beginning of June at the latest. If on its arrival there you have no news of M. de Bussy or of either of the two ships on board which he may be sailing,<sup>3</sup> you are to send word at once by a corvette via Muskat and Aleppo.

*Operations.*—The choice of the point of disembarkation for operations in India is subject to so many circumstances, local or otherwise, that it is impossible at this great distance to lay down anything on this point. As, however, there may be certain operations which most particularly fulfil the intentions of the King it will be proper to point them out, His Majesty leaving full liberty of action to the commanders of the troops and the squadron according to the monsoon and the attitude and situation in which

<sup>1</sup> *Archives des Colonies.* C2, 166. Undated, but about November 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Sailed November 11th, 1781.

<sup>3</sup> Sailed December 11th.

they find the Indian Princes, in particular the Mahrattas and Hyder Ali Khan.

There is good reason to believe that the presence of M. de Bussy may decide the Princes to declare themselves, owing to the high consideration in which he is held in India ; but we do not flatter ourselves that M. Duchemin, who has had no opportunity of making his capacity and intentions known, will inspire them with the same confidence ; and if these Princes are not found to be already at war with the English it is to be expected that nothing but a success obtained by the King's army without their help would persuade them to join us.

Although the attitude of these Princes, and the situation of the Dutch, should have the greatest influence in making choice of the coast to be selected as the theatre of war, the opening of the campaign in the Indian peninsula should consist of a vigorous and decisive blow : which, by securing an indispensable *point d'appui* for the subsequent operations and their success, will instil confidence in the Country Princes and engage their co-operation in concert with us against the common enemy. Madras and Bombay appear the only places which fulfil this condition on one or the other coast.

*Coromandel coast.*—If, on the arrival of the King's forces in India, Hyder Ali Khan is already at war with the English—a thing one hardly dares to hope for—and this Prince has established himself advantageously on the Coromandel coast, it is considered that there should be no hesitation in going there at once, even in the unfavourable season, and in besieging Madras as soon as possible : the capture of that place necessarily bringing in its train the complete conquest of the Coromandel and Orissa coasts.

In case the Prince who is at war with the English should not be maintaining himself on the coast, except with varied success, it is considered that it would still be proper to aid him with all our forces, and to attack Madras conjointly with him.

If, on the other hand, Hyder Ali Khan has made peace, Negapatam offers the only place (provided the Dutch are still in possession of it) in which we could find the necessary facilities for disembarkation. For if the English have obtained possession of that place, there appears to be no other point either on the Coromandel or Orissa coasts, both of which are wholly in the

hands of the English, where we could procure the chillingas and seamen of the country without which it is impossible to land.

Supposing, however, ourselves able to land at Negapatam, and that the English have no enemies other than ourselves to fight on the Coromandel coast, we shall have sixty leagues of country to cover to reach Madras, one part of which is intersected seriously by the Cauvery River. This might involve us in operations in the country and a war of *chicane*,<sup>1</sup> which would decide nothing, in which we should consume much time and much precious munitions before we could mount the siege of Madras, which is the principal object of our landing on this coast.

*Malabar coast.*—To add to the foregoing objection, which in itself appears sufficient to compel us to give up any idea of operations on the Coromandel coast if Hyder Ali should have come to an agreement with the English, and to induce us to turn our attention to the Malabar coast, is that of the monsoons.

A convoy leaving France in December will not reach Mauritius until the following May or June, and will require not less than two months for overhaul, recuperation of the sick, and the necessary preparations for the transport of the army to India. It would therefore not be possible to leave Mauritius until August or September, or to reach the coast till October, in which season the change of the monsoon forces ships to leave the Coromandel coast, and does not allow them to make any long stay on the coast between October and April when the heavy rains hinder the movement of troops on the continent.

Leaving however the islands at the same date, we should reach the Malabar coast at the beginning of the fine season on that coast. We could even hope to arrive there and disembark before the enemy squadron, which would not leave the Coromandel coast till October, could arrive to interfere with our landing.

The Malabar coast, throughout its whole length, is under the sway of Hyder Ali Khan and the Mahrattas. Thus we could hope to find there all possible facilities for landing and provisions. Although we could not disembark in Bombay Harbour, or in the environs of that place, nothing could prevent us from landing in the territories of the Mahrattas or the Portuguese and to reach

<sup>1</sup> "Guerre de chicane," a war in which one engages only in minor engagements for the capture of territory.

Bombay in a few days. It cannot be doubted that the Court of Poonah, on seeing us land so close to it, would contribute to the utmost to our operations, in the success of which it is at least as interested as ourselves. Hyder Ali Khan himself would certainly not delay in declaring himself anew against the English if he saw us there in a position to support him with such strong forces. The capture of Bombay will give us a solid establishment in the midst of our natural allies and a port for our squadron which thereby would not be forced to go to Mauritius for their refits : while the English squadron would then have neither port nor magazine in the Indian ocean, an inestimable advantage to us, particularly in time of war. . . . All our efforts should in the beginning be directed towards obtaining a base in India, which will give us the necessary foundation for our ensuing operations and will instil confidence in our allies by making their interests the same as ours—an object which could not be fulfilled if we were to limit our operations to a campaign in the field.

It is considered that in any case we should do well to land in Ceylon, where it would be possible to concert our plans with the Dutch, and from that island we shall threaten both coasts of India equally.

## APPENDIX VI

### THE PROPOSED SECOND ATTACK ON THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

ON October 18th, 1781—at the time, it must be observed, at which the expedition under de Bussy was in course of preparation—orders had been given for the departure of a strong military reinforcement to India. The Directors of the East India Company took the opportunity to point out the advantages of capturing the Cape. The French, it was remarked, would in all probability take over the government of the Cape, at least for the period of the war, and thus the situation would become very serious. They would be able to take St. Helena, to destroy all shipping in the roads. If Suffren had looked into the anchorage on his way he would have taken eighteen ships and the *Renown*, 50, their escort. Even if St. Helena were left alone it was not capable of affording supplies to the home-coming India ships and His Majesty's fleet, for which it depended upon the Cape.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore the capture was important and the occasion served. Troops to the number of nearly 5,000—double the force sent with Johnstone—were now under orders for India. If the attack were successful, a half or thereabouts of the force could be left there as a garrison, for the naval and military forces already on the Coromandel coast and the favourable turn which would be given to affairs would make it possible to spare this force. An escort of six ships of the line would be enough to protect the force on its passage.

“If the measure succeed,” the memorandum proceeded, “the obvious consequence must be the cutting off from the French and Dutch of those resources of supply without which they must be reduced to the utmost distress, for the means of support to those islands, and for the maintenance of their fleet in India: and the certain acquisition to Britain, and consequently to the

<sup>1</sup> *Vide ante*, p. 408, where it is stated that Suffren had instructions, if the wind served, to attack St. Helena.

East India Company, of every requisite furnished at present from the Cape of Good Hope to our enemies."

Lord Hillsborough, to whom this proposal was submitted, asked how the Cape, if taken, was to be defended against the French from Mauritius or the Dutch from Batavia. As our fleet must leave the Cape and proceed to India where the reinforcement was necessary, it appeared to him improbable that we could hold the place.

To this the Company replied (October 25th) that the inhabitants would at least be neutral; for they liked neither the French nor the government of their own arbitrary Company. Three thousand troops would hold the Cape without difficulty, and their garrison could at any time be strengthened with sepoys within four months. The British fleet would always follow the French fleet; and if the French were at Mauritius, the British would be at the Cape, if the French went to India, the British would proceed thither by the shortest route. Information would, of course, be necessary, but "it cannot be doubted but the King's Admiral will always take measures to obtain information of the movements of the enemy by stationing cruisers as will enable him to protect the Cape from any force that may be sent against it." The Cape would indeed become "the General Rendezvous"—meaning the headquarters—of the Eastern Command. There were no docks there, but this was of no great importance as all other repairs could be effected there as well as in India.

The question, however, they urged was not simply whether we should attempt the Cape for the sake of conquest or to distress the enemy; it involved whether St. Helena shall be cut off of all supplies for the King's and Company's homeward-bound ships and be liable to attack which our active enemies, so near the island, were sure to make. This repetition of the relation between the Cape and St. Helena indicates how strongly impressed the Company were with the weakness of that particular point in the line of communication with India. The Power holding the Cape, they proceeded, has the key to the East Indies: it is the Gibraltar of India. This had not been felt during the long peace or alliance between England and Holland, but the rupture had changed the situation. Now, possession of the Cape was of the first importance. No fleet, they repeated, can



possibly sail to or return from India even in peace without touching at some proper place for refreshment ; and in time of war it must be equally necessary for protection. The places about midway on the voyage were three only : the Cape, Madagascar and St. Helena. Even in peace St. Helena had hardly proved able to accommodate and supply the Company's ships ; in war, they again repeated, it must be supplied from the Cape, and now that last resource was cut off. Therefore we should take the place at once, and under no conditions should we return it.

Six days later the application was renewed. Reliable information had then been received that de Bussy was going to India with reinforcements.<sup>1</sup> This made it more imperative than ever to take the Cape. Incidentally, it is interesting to observe that this information of de Bussy's intended departure had reached London a fortnight before he sailed notwithstanding all the precautions for secrecy that had been taken, including embarking him under a false name at Cadiz : a warning—one of only too many—of the difficulty of preserving secrecy in war.

Two days later Lord Hillsborough received the Directors personally to discuss the matter. The Secretary of State (it will be observed that in the discussion of question of war policy the First Lord of the Admiralty was not called into Council) put certain questions before the Directors, as follows :

Q. What are the advantages and disadvantages to the Public and the Company from the Cape being in the hands of the English or the French ?

A. Whichever has it may govern India. It is absolutely necessary to have a place of refreshment on the long voyage to India and there are four places only—the French Islands, St. Helena, Madagascar and the Cape with its three bays : False, Table and Saldanha. At St. Helena there is no harbour ; it cannot serve the ships with its own resources : ships in its road are exposed to attack by sea.

Madagascar has insufficient resources, is subject to hurricanes, has a bad climate, and what supplies exist are taken by the French at Mauritius.

The French Islands cannot supply themselves. They therefore

<sup>1</sup> Letters from Directors to Lord Hillsborough, October 31st, 1781, India Office. *Home Misc.* 154.

depend on the Cape and on Europe : and, a little, on Madagascar. There are five harbours, they are well fortified ; but they have no docks, the climate is unhealthy and they are liable to hurricanes.

The Cape has every advantage except docks. It is midway to India : the ports are adapted to every season. It is fertile for six or seven hundred miles inland, and all kinds of provisions are provided locally. The Hottentots are inoffensive and are dissatisfied with the Dutch government. Ships of force can be stationed there to intercept ships on the Indian voyages. Naval storehouses and magazines could be put up there. All repairs except docking are possible, and that could be done at Bombay.

Q. What should be done with regard to the Cape ?

A. The troops now intended for India should attempt its capture.

Q. What is the enemy's force there ?

A. No dependable information, but that can be procured by the commander of the expedition.

Q. What force do you understand is intended for India ?

A. Six ships of the line, nineteen East India ships of 26 to 36 guns, carrying :

Two regiments of infantry of 1,168 men each	.	.	.	.	2,336 men
One regiment of horse	.	.	.	.	414 "
Recruits from Lord Seaforth's regiment	.	.	.	.	49 "
Hanoverians	.	.	.	.	1,000 "
Cadets and recruits from the Company	.	.	.	.	600 "
				Total	4,399 "

Q. Are ships ready to sail, or when will they be ready ?

A. On November 30th.

Q. How, if taken, can the possessions be kept ?

A. A garrison of 4,000 men and sepoys added from India. Mahommedan troops would have no objection to serving overseas.

Q. How, if the inhabitants prove hostile, can the garrison be kept ?

A. There is no risk of that. The trade will grow, and the advantages are such that our rule will bring prosperity.

To what tribunal this proposal was subsequently submitted

does not appear. It was not approved. Lord Hillsborough's reply indicated that the necessary increase in force would cause such delay that the enemy would probably arrive before us. To this the Company replied that transport could be furnished quickly and men could be embarked in the men-of-war and on board the East India Company's ships. The squadron under Suffren, they remarked, had transported and landed 600 men at the Cape, and fifteen or twenty days could be gained over the French in their voyage.

The dilatory manner in which this proposal was handled is noticeable. The Company first made the proposal on October 10th. Troops were then already under orders, and transport was being collected. The question was not even seriously discussed until Lord Hillsborough's interrogatory on November 7th, nor disposed of till another week had passed. By then the first part of the French squadron, knowledge of whose preparation was in the Company's hands before October 18th, had sailed, and although this was done, and the second French squadron sailed in December, it was not until February 6th that Bickerton and his forces left England.

How little the situation in India was appreciated at home, and how oblivious the authorities were of the need and the advantages of prompt action, is no less shown by their treatment of this question than in their subsequent action; which, though it came to nothing, may fitly be referred to if only for forming an idea of the Ministry's competence to conduct war.

The Company, having failed to attain their end, hoped then to procure some gain to themselves in territorial extensions by conquest. They therefore returned to Lord Hillsborough with the proposal to capture Acheen or the Seychelles; wholly without a thought as to whether the course of the war would be affected thereby. To this Hillsborough saw no objection and directed instructions to be prepared for operations in the Seychelles, Acheen, the Andamans and the Nicobars. This was done. The object, at the Seychelles, was the destruction of the French settlement—a settlement which in no way whatever had affected the war; and, in the other instances, to form settlements for the increase of the Company's trade.

This foolish proposal was sent by Lord Hillsborough to Hughes.

It did not reach him until the end of 1782. He rejected all the schemes as impracticable, pointing out that all the experience of the last twelve months had clearly shown "how little it has been in the power of the Company's Governors or in mine, to attempt what is therein recommended and indeed until the power of the French by sea in this country is broken it will require all our exertions to preserve to the Company what they have already acquired.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hughes to Townshend, January 15th, 1783. No. 2, 750.

## APPENDIX VII

### THE PROPOSED EXPEDITION TO THE SOUTH SEAS

*Memorandum in the Sandwich papers at Hinchinbrook by Lord Sandwich on the execution of the expedition*<sup>1</sup>

IN order to judge whether the expedition to the South Seas is at this time advisable, it is necessary to consider from whence that expedition shall take its departure, and to compare the objections and advantages in an equipment in the East Indies or in England: for it is taken for granted that from one of these two points the machine must come.

In the idea of sending the force from the East Indies it is to be supposed that we have a larger force in those seas at this time than is necessary for the protection of our own settlements, and that nothing material can be attempted in those seas, as we are already in possession of everything that belonged to the French except the Islands of Mauritius which probably are too strong to be attempted without great uncertainty of success: as are also the Manillas where we are told the Spaniards have taken much more care to provide themselves against an attack than they had hitherto.

The measure then would be to order Sir Edward Hughes, who has now eight ships of the line under his command, to fit a proper squadron to consist of not less than four of the line, and to proceed himself, or detach them under the command of a judicious officer, whenever the season would admit into the South Seas to distress the enemy wherever he shall judge them (from intelligence he shall receive) to be the most vulnerable. This I apprehend to have been the kind of orders given to Commodore Anson and I do not see how any precise orders can be given as to the particular place where the impression is to be made.

(Commodore Anson was under the orders of the Secretary of State, consequently there are no traces of his secret instructions

<sup>1</sup> This paper is in Lord Sandwich's handwriting, undated.

in the Admiralty office, and on enquiry they are not to be found in that of the Secretary of State. But it is clear that he had only general instructions to molest the enemy, as it appears in the printed account of that voyage, that when the squadron was at port St. Julian's on the coast of Brazil the Commodore summoned all his captains to a Council-of-War to regulate the plan and their future operations.)

Some land force may be wanting and it is hoped that that assistance may be procured from the East India Company. This is one of the advantages in the equipment in India. The others are that it will be no diminution of our force at home which is so much wanted at this crisis : and the secret (upon which everything depends) may be much longer kept from the enemy.

As to the proper time of sailing from the coast of Coromandel or from England it will be the same ; that is to say in May or June.

Having mentioned the advantages of an equipment in India I must now consider what is to be said on the other side of the question. It will be very uncertain whether Sir Edward Hughes will get his orders in due time to collect his ships, which may be dispersed on different stations. We must allow a passage of six months for any conveyance by sea, and on enquiry I find that at this season of the year an express by land through Aleppo could not take less than four months.

After the receipt of the orders it will be a matter of doubt whether he can be able to supply the squadron with a proper quantity of stores, provisions and necessaries for such an expedition ; and if he cannot do that without waiting for the arrival of the storeship that is just now sailed from Spithead, the whole success of the undertaking must depend on the safe and speedy arrival of that ship ; which it is feared must be too late, as six months for a loaded ship not calculated for sailing will be a very quick passage. Add to this that Sir Edward has orders to send three of his ships home in the spring ; which orders are since (by orders from the Secretary of State) explained not to mean that he shall send them away if he has undertaken anything against the enemy in this part of the world. It is therefore to be observed that in either case of having sent the ships home

or employed them in India he will not be able to carry into execution the equipment for the South Seas.

There is another circumstance which militates strongly against our diminishing our naval force in India, namely, that we shall thereby be in danger of becoming inferior and losing all our acquisitions in these parts. The last letters from the Cape bring advice that two French ships of the line sailed from thence for Mauritius a very short time before Sir Edward Hughes's arrival. There was at least one of the line already there and the last accounts from France assure us that four ships of the line are preparing to sail for India.

If, therefore, it should be judged advisable to send the expedition from the East Indies, it will be absolutely necessary to replace them from home and that, with regard to the diminution of our home defence, would be exactly the same thing as if the ships were sent from hence round Cape Horn.

I will now consider the question of equipping the expedition in England. In the first place, the squadron will be of the exact force that may be judged proper. It seems to me the sort of squadron should be :

One of 74.	One of 28 or 32.
One of 64.	One sloop.
Two of 50.	One storeship.
Two of 40.	Two victuallers.

It may with certainty sail at the proper season. It will be completely manned, fitted, victualled and stored for such a voyage. We shall have a better choice of officers fit for such an undertaking. It will be necessary to communicate with the East India Company which I apprehend must be done in the other case.

The chief officer to undertake it will be better instructed and informed of the intention of the expedition, and he will be better able to collect materials, information and people that will be essential to him ; and thus nothing would be uncertain as to the strength, condition and time of the squadron sailing.

The disadvantages that occur to me in the home equipment are that the destination of such a squadron will be liable to be discovered, and the enemy will thereby be enabled to defeat

it ; and indeed though I have used the word in the plural number I think there is only that one disadvantage. It will therefore be proper to consider how that may be guarded against. It may be given out to be intended for Mauritius and the ships from India with an army are to meet it for that purpose as I believe was intended last war and a squadron ordered for that purpose under the command of Mr. Keppel. This may be whispered privately, but in such a way that it reaches the spies of the enemy as a secret. At the same time it may be reported more openly that the squadron is for the West Indies, or it may be whispered that there is a design to attack Vera Cruz or some place in the West Indies. To favour the notion of its being for Mauritius some of the Company's ships (which will probably be ready at that time) may sail under its convoy.

If the squadron sails from home, perhaps it may be so contrived that after passing the South Sea it may meet a detachment from India at an appointed rendezvous in order to attack Manilla, as was first intended in Lord Anson's expedition, at least by detaching some ships from the East Indies it will be doubling the chance of intercepting the ships between Manilla and Acapulco for that season.



## APPENDIX VIII

### ADMIRAL HUGHES ON THE DEFENCE OF BOMBAY

BEFORE Admiral Hughes quitted the station in 1784, he was asked by the Governor and Select Committee of Bombay for his opinion concerning the defence of Bombay. His reply was as follows : <sup>1</sup>

“ If the defence of the Company’s possessions in the East Indies depends in a very great degree, if not entirely, in time of war on the superiority or exertions of His Majesty’s squadron destined and employed for that purpose, as was the case in the last as well as the former war with France, then is the safety of Bombay of the utmost importance to the safety of the whole, for at no other port or place in our possession could the ships of the squadron be even properly refitted, much less repaired. At Bombay, as the only place of refit, are deposited all the masts and other stores for ships, and it not only furnishes a great number of expert native artificers, but its docks are of the utmost importance. In short, without Bombay, or some other as convenient harbour in our possession, no squadron or force could be kept up in this country. Few arguments are needed to prove all this when I instance the nine sail of His Majesty’s line of battleships which arrived in this harbour on December 17th, 1782, and after four severe conflicts with the French squadron had suffered greatly in their hulls, not a serviceable lower mast on board any of them. Not a fish for a mast or a spar for a topmast to be found but at Bombay. Five ships of the number uncoppered and foul by being two years off the ground, and of course a heavy clog to the operations of the other ships of the squadron that were coppered ; at the same time the ships’ companies reduced to half their complements by sickness. With all these circumstances of distress and

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir E. Hughes to the Governor and Select Committee of Bombay, May 13th, 1784. *India Office Records. Home Misc. 174.*

difficulty, you, gentlemen, saw, with mixed pleasure and surprise, that very squadron in less than three months put to sea to seek the enemy, completely refitted, and the health of the ships' companies in a great measure restored. The constant exertions of the officers of the squadron, the use of the docks, supplies of all kinds of ship timber and plank, and numerous native artificers of Bombay, effected this great end ; and without them I am positive His Majesty's squadron could not in any other port in the East Indies have been put in a condition to face the enemy with even hopes of success. Of such consequence then is the safe possession of Bombay to the safety of all the Company's other possessions.

" I shall next view Bombay as a place of arms in possession of respectable military force, not for its defence only, as that is absolutely necessary, but for offence. In this point of view its situation near to Poonah, the capital of the Mahrattas, and having the most valuable part of the Mysorean dominions open to attack by sea, with a number of its own armed ships and vessels as well as merchant ships large and capable of transport, must at all times keep these Powers in awe : and these are the only Powers the Company have any reason to apprehend mischief from.

" The offensive military force of Bombay may at all times be called forth to arrest or vindicate the rights of the Company against either the Mahrattas or Mysoreans, and indeed any other Power in India, and when conjoined with the military exertions of Madras and Bengal must overmatch the Mahrattas and Mysoreans, even if joined together ; and the Bombay establishment will have the great advantage of transporting by sea every requisite for pushing the war to the places most convenient for attack against either or both.

" What force may be necessary to be kept up in the garrison of Bombay for its actual defence is not for me to say, but as I see the defences are very extensive I conjecture they will require a numerous garrison to defend them in case of attack ; and it never should be left unprepared for such a defence, in the absence of His Majesty's squadron in particular. The force for offence, exclusive of the garrison, ought in my opinion not to consist of less than a regiment of Europeans formed into two

battalions of 800 men each, four companies of European Artillery of 80 men each, and eight battalions of well disciplined sepoys. This force, kept at all times in a condition to act from Bombay, where a ready transport can with ease be had into the enemies' weakest parts, will awe the Country Powers more than double the number of either of the other Presidencies, where magazines of everything requisite for the support of an army must be established at a distance before their army can safely march.

“These, Gentlemen, are my sentiments of the matters on which you have been pleased to ask my opinion. They are founded on observation and experience during nearly ten years I have had the honour to serve the Company and my Country as Commander-in-Chief in these seas. . . . If the Company cannot otherwise afford such an expense I am fully satisfied a diminution of the military force at the other Presidencies would be more eligible and beneficial to them than to leave Bombay without the force I have stated above.”

## APPENDIX IX

### ADMIRAL HUGHES ON THE SITUATION IN INDIA <sup>1</sup>

“ALTHOUGH the constant calls to the discharges of my duty as the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty’s squadron in these seas have occupied almost every moment of my time for these three years past, yet I have not lost sight of another part of duty likewise incumbent on me, faithfully to inform His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State in your Department, of the state and disposition of the several Princes and Powers bordering on the Company’s possessions or in connection with the Company’s servants.

“Amongst the first of these at this time is the Company’s old and faithful friend and Ally, the Nabob of Arcot and the Carnatic. This Prince under many pretences is not only stripped of the whole of the Revenue of his Dominions, but even his prerogative of administering Justice according to the established laws of the various sets of Religion in his Dominions is most unaccountably wrenched from him, and now held in the hands of the Select Committee of this Presidency, and as I have no doubt this indigent and ill-treated Prince will lay the real situation of his affairs before your Lordship, I have only stated to your Lordship facts that are self-evident to me on the spot.

“The next in consequence to the quiet and welfare of the Company’s possessions in India are the Mahratta States. With them, a peace has been concluded and is ratified, but unwillingly on their parts. Even this has been purchased at a heavy loss of Revenue to the Company and I can assure your Lordship I did by every means of advice to the several Presidencies oppose the war with these states from the beginning, and use every means in my power to effect a pacification with them two years ago, as your Lordship may see by my correspondence with your predecessor in office. This ill-judged and unhappy war was the original cause of Hyder Ali’s invasion of the Carnatic, which has caused the desolation of that country, cost the country several

<sup>1</sup> Sir E. Hughes to Lord Sydney, July 25th, 1783.

millions, and had nearly brought on the loss of all their valuable possessions on the Coromandel coast.

“Tippoo Sahib, the son and successor of Hyder Ali, having been drawn off from the Carnatic about the beginning of this year to protect his own dominions on the Malabar coast against the successful attack of the Bombay Army under General Mathews, has captured that officer with the greater part of the troops under his command in Beddenore, the capital of the province of that name on the Malabar coast, and a part of Tippoo's dominions there which the General had taken possession of as well as Mangalore, Onore and some other seaports belonging to Tippoo. These are at this time besieged by him and there is a great reason to fear they will fall into his hands. His allies the French had sent a detachment of their troops with him to the Malabar coast which the Marquess de Bussy, the French Commander-in-Chief, says he has recalled on the certainty of a Peace between Great Britain and France, and application has been made to him (Tippoo Sahib) by this Presidency, jointly with the Marquess de Bussy, to know if he will accede to the Peace on the terms of the Preliminary articles between Great Britain and France, but no answer has as yet been given by him. This Prince, young and a good general, may embarrass the affairs of the Company, both on this and the Malabar coast exceedingly, unless a Peace is concluded with him by the Company on fair terms, for besides the ships and vessels of war belonging to Hyder Ali, his father, destroyed by His Majesty's squadron in the end of the year 1780, General Mathews on getting possession of the Sea Ports of the Beddenore Province found nineteen large ships, some of them calculated to mount 60 guns, some completely built and all in great forwardness : a force which had it once got to sea would have shut up the harbour of Bombay in the absence of His Majesty's squadron and entirely ruined the Company's valuable trade on the Malabar coast. And, indeed, unless a Peace is concluded speedily he may again return to ravage the Carnatic with the underhand assistance of his French friends who no doubt will be ready to play an after game and benefit by his success.

“The Nizam or Soubar of the Deccan, the Prince of the next consequence to the Company's affairs in this country, has been much disobliged by the conduct of the Company's servants at

this Presidency on their withholding from him for some years past the sum stipulated as a compensation for the voluntary surrender of the Northern Circars to them. This induced him to join councils with the Mahrattas and Hyder Ali, and he has avowed himself to have planned with Hyder the invasion of the Carnatic. He had also planned with the French to strip the Company of the whole of their possessions on this coast beginning with the Northern Circars. Two accidents fortunately prevented this plan from taking effect : the sickness and mortality of the troops that came out for that service under the Marquess de Bussy, which retarded their arrival on this coast till March last, when they were obliged to rendezvous at Trincomali, there to join the squadron under the command of Monsieur Suffren who had waited expecting M. Bussy at Acheen from the beginning of November to the end of December last, and off Ganjam from the beginning of January to the middle of February, when he proceeded to Trincomali and was there joined by the Marquess de Bussy with the *Fendant* and *Argonaute* of 74 guns each, the *Hardi* of 64, *Cléopâtre* of 40, and the thirty sail of transports, storeships and victuallers. The other accident which as effectually disabled the Nizam from executing his part of the plan was the revolt of the son of Fazil Bey, the Nabob of Nourmoul, and a dependent of the Nizam's, who, on being called into the field by him for the purpose of joining M. Bussy, refused obedience, and has in three engagements with the Nizam's forces repelled them and thrown off all objections to him. These fortunate circumstances for the affairs of the Company totally disappointed both the Marquess de Bussy and the Nizam in their plan of operations ; and at the time of the news of the Preliminary Articles of Peace between Great Britain and France being ratified on February 9th last, arrived here, the whole of the French force by land except the detachment sent with Tippoo Sahib to the Malabar coast, was shut up and closely besieged in Cuddalore by the army under Major-General Stuart. The Nizam persisting in his resentment to the Company will suffer no Resident of theirs at his Court, and it appears to me the payment of his just demands of the money due to him on account of his cession of the Northern Circars is the only fair means left to procure his friendship which, in the present circumstances of

the Company's affairs, is very much to be desired : for although his power is not to be much dreaded, his rank and influence among other Powers is certainly great.

“The political abilities of the Governor-General and Council of Bengal, finding the bad consequences of the war with the Mah-rattas, preserved the friendship of all the Powers of any consequence bordering on the Company's possessions in Bengal and Behar, except the affairs of Chit Sing which I don't well comprehend.”

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